Audit and Assessment of Leaving Care Services in London.

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Audit and Assessment of Leaving Care Services in London

Executive summary

Care leavers

There has been growing recognition that young people leaving care are among the most vulnerable in our society. As young care leavers move into adulthood, they bring experiences that are significantly different from that of other young people.

Care leavers:

- Begin to live independently at a much earlier age
- Have lower level of educational attainments
- Are more likely to be unemployed
- Are more likely to experience homelessness and to live in poverty
- Are more likely to experience teenage parenthood

These problems appear to be more acute in London.

The policy context

Over the past two decades a substantial body of research has been influential on policy and practice towards care leavers by both central and local government. This can be seen in:

- Changes in the organisation of SSD services: more specialist leaving care services, more resources allocated to leaving care support, more inter-agency working, more consultation with young people

- Changes to the legislative framework of the Children Act 1989 by proposals in the Children (Leaving Care) Bill currently going through Parliament. Among new duties local authorities will be required to draw up pathway plans and appoint a young persons advisor for each care leaver

- The Quality Protects Initiative which identifies care leavers as a priority, sets new objectives and outcome targets and provides new resources to achieve these

- The Connexions strategy to provide young people with support, including financial support, for their education and career development
• The Rough Sleepers Unit established in April 1999 to reduce the number of people sleeping rough

The research study

This study sought to:
- Audit the range of services for care leavers in London, especially accommodation
- Assess the effectiveness of the London boroughs in delivering a co-ordinated service
- Ascertain the views of care leavers

It has done this through an:
- Analysis of current and planned service provision
- Postal questionnaires to 33 London boroughs
- Interviews with lead officers in SSDs
- Interviews with other agencies
- Interviews with service providers
- Interviews and group discussions with young people

The findings are reported under the following themes:
- Consulting with young people
- Young people’s perspectives
- Arrangements for supporting young people
- Accommodation
- Financial support
- Support in education, training and employment
- Personal Support

Consulting with young people

• There is increasing activity by SSDs to consult with young people on both their individual care and on planning and delivering services

• Almost three quarters (73%) of SSDs were satisfied or very satisfied with the involvement of young people in individual planning compared to less than 39% in respect of service planning

• Despite many examples of consultation exercises, few authorities had an overall strategy on consultation with young people

• Only a minority had effective mechanisms for feeding back to young people and demonstrating outcomes from consultation

• SSDs were hampered in their planning for particular groups by lack of information and awareness; few had reliable information on the ethnicity of care leavers, on asylum seekers, on disabled young people or those who were pregnant or parents
Despite this SSDs expressed satisfaction with the services they offered to these four groups: the levels of satisfaction were 70%; 45%; 46%; 58% respectively.

There were some groups SSDs found more difficult to engage with: those with moderate learning disabilities and those with mental health or behavioural problems.

**Young people’s perspectives**

- Interviews were held with 39 young people who had left or were about to leave care and were in contact with SSD and 18 young people who had experienced homelessness since leaving care.

- Those leaving care were less likely to be worried (18%) than who had those already left (61%) – this later group admitted they were less ready to leave care than they thought at the time.

- A third of all the young people saw SSD as helpful; how and when they get advice affects its value.

- Young people wanted more advice on money management, accommodation; practical skills and inter-personnel relationships.

- When asked what they would change the strongest message concerned relationships with social services – they wanted social workers to remain in contact and have access to a 24 hour point of contact.

**Arrangements for supporting young people**

- Most SSDs are in a process of changing the organisation of their leaving care services.

- Most have specialist leaving care services; four main types of arrangement were identified:
  - Leaving care services contracted out to voluntary sector (1 example)
  - Dual system, - leaving care workers offering support to young people but case responsibility with locality social worker (13 examples)
  - Looked after adolescent teams – mostly dealing with young people aged 16 and older (14 examples)
  - Teams for vulnerable young people – dealing with young people (often 15+) who are looked after or in need (5 examples)

- Most SSDs (85%) had a leaving care policy; 1/3 of these were being revised; all but 2 applied to SSD only.

- Only 1 SSD expressed satisfaction with the process for assessing readiness to leave care – its checklist provides a good practice example.
Multi-agency assessments were limited, as was the provision of training to field workers, residential and foster carers

Less than 1/3 (28%) of SSDs develop personalised care plans for all care leavers and a further 1/3 provided this to most care leavers

Fewer than half of all care leavers are provided with written information on resources or a named contact person

Accommodation

Accommodation needs depend on the age at which young people cease to be looked after. Very few SSDs (5) had explicit written policies on the age of leaving care, and few (14) were able to provide statistics on the age of those being looked after in order to predict future numbers leaving care – and the reliability of this information is poor

Respondents acknowledged that in many departments young people ceased to be looked after at 16 and 17 and that some ‘were allowed’ to drift away without any formal discharge. Most departments reported recent changes in practices to prevent inappropriately early discharges

Most SSDs (90%) had an accommodation strategy, though these tended to be descriptive rather than based on assessment of need

All authorities were currently developing their range of semi-independent accommodation but gaps were identified in emergency accommodation, supported lodgings, and high support accommodation

Gaps were also identified in accommodation for particular groups, most noticeably those with mental health problems and challenging and difficult behaviour

Most authorities (21) had or were planning supported lodging facilities; these were felt to be most suitable for fairly settled young people. Issues were raised about the appropriate form of recruitment and assessment of those providing support

There was no evidence that ‘staying on accommodation’ was used or being developed in a regular or consistent way

The greatest growth in recent years has been in supported accommodation: shared flats or houses or training flats. Most is provided by housing agencies and offers a form of housing plus support where the support to young people is provided by agencies other than the SSD. This can raise issues about continuing input from social workers

A range of staffing arrangements applied; concerns were raised about the lack of regulation of staff working with young people in this way

There is satisfaction with the working relationships between SSDs and housing
agencies; these increasingly positive relationships are particularly noticeably in respect of permanent tendencies for young people and dealing with rent arrears

- The shortages of appropriate housing stock can cause delays and means that young people are often offered low quality housing in poor areas; this can be particularly difficult for those who have been placed outside the authority and have to return there to acquire a tenancy

- Young people interviewed demonstrated that surviving in a permanent tenancy is difficult; the SSDs need to continue to support these young people taking the initiative to keep in touch

- About half the young people felt that they were not given enough information about accommodation or when they were likely to move; almost ¾ (70%) felt they had been given little or no choice in their accommodation

- Over 1/3 of the young people were pleased and many had good things to say about their accommodation – but there was also many dislikes expressed, mainly around the quality and location of the accommodation

Financial support

- The duties of local authorities to assist care leavers are likely to be significantly changed with the new proposed legislation. This report reflects the current situation

- Most SSDs informed young people about their entitlement to financial support verbally; there is a need for clear, explicit, written information

- There is evidence of improving links between SSDs and Housing benefits Departments and The Benefits Agency; this is less true in respect of Education Departments in respect of education grants

- There is wide variation in the level of leaving care Grant provided; averaged ranged from £165 to £1600. Most SSDs were satisfied with the type and level of financial support they provided

- Almost half (47%) of the young people interviewed felt they had had enough information on grants and benefits and a similar proportion (48%) in respect of managing money

- Young people expressed a range of concerns about their financial support and their skills in managing their low budgets; older young people acknowledged it was only later they realised how much information and support they would need
Support in Education Training and Employment

- Past research highlights the poor outcomes for care leavers in terms of education, training and employment (ET&E); there are several new or planned initiatives seeking to address this; New Joint Guidance from DH and DfEE; Quality Protects; Connexions; Children (leaving care) Bill.

- Almost 2/3 (64%) of SSDs were satisfied with their current support in Education Training & Employment; nonetheless changes were being implemented which sought to improve this:
  - Improving information on education of care leavers
  - Working more collaboratively with Education
  - Building relationships with schools
  - Addressing education throughout a child’s care career

- Young people’s concerns focused on:
  - Lack of priority given to education by SSD
  - Lack of financial support in further and higher education
  - Inadequate support in career planning and employment

- There are emerging new initiatives by SSDs, in partnership with others, to support ET&E.

- Just over half (55%) of SSDs had inclusive arrangements for meeting the ET&E needs of young people with SEN and over half (55%) were satisfied with their arrangements.

- Concerns were expressed about meeting the needs of those with moderate learning disabilities and those disaffected young people who are least likely to engage with SSDs.

Personal Support

- Care leavers have an accelerated transition to independence: they must learn to manage a home, find and keep employment, cope financially and build and sustain a network of support and friendships in a very short period.

- Young people identified *coping alone* and *companionship* as their greatest need.

- With hindsight older care leavers recognised the enormous support needed in living independently and that they may not have made best use of that offered – a second chance is often needed.
• Some SSDs were addressing this through, for example, drop-in centres, free leisure cards, Sunday lunch clubs, 24 hour help-lines.

• Young people saw their greatest need for information as relating to personal relationships – safe sex, contraception, STDs.

• SSDs would welcome more support from health and other agencies on personal and health education, and on meeting the considerable mental health needs of care leavers.

• SSDs were increasing their efforts, in conjunction with others, to support the cultural needs of young people, especially asylum seekers.
1. Leaving care services in London: the context

There has been a growing recognition over the past 25 years that young people leaving public care are among the most vulnerable in our society. In introducing this Audit and Assessment of Leaving Care Services in London, we discuss briefly the findings from previous research on leaving care and describe current practice and policy issues as they apply to London in particular. There follows a description of the project: its aims and objectives and the methods employed to carry it out. Throughout this report the term Audit and Assessment is used to refer to this study.

However, it may be useful to start with some explanation of the terms ‘in care’ and ‘leaving care’ as used in the report.

Where the parent or parents of a child are unable or unwilling to provide adequate care, he or she may become ‘looked after’ by the local authority. The term ‘looked after’ was introduced by the Children Act 1989. It includes to main groups of children and young people. First, those who are looked after by the local authority with the agreement of their parent(s), or at the request of young people over 16 years, are said to be ‘accommodated by the local authority’. The length of time children are accommodated can range from a few days to several years, but the majority will return home.

The second group are those children on whom the Court has passed a Care Order committing the child to the care of the local authority. These children are ‘in care’. The Care Order will last until the young person is 18 years old, unless a Revocation Order is made by the Court. ‘Looked after’ children include those who are accommodated and those in care. ‘Children looked after’ are sometimes referred to as ‘children in public care’.

About two thirds of looked after children are placed with foster carers, with 12% of mainly older young people in children’s homes, and a similar proportion living with parents. A small proportion will live in lodgings or a semi-independent living situation. Most placements are still provided by the local authority but there is an increasing use of private and voluntary providers of all forms of placements.

For historical reasons, the term ‘care leaver’ is used to describe any young person, whether accommodated or in care, who is preparing to, or has ceased to be, looked after by the local authority after the age of 16. Specialist services for these young people are referred to as ‘Leaving Care’ or ‘After Care’ services.

Research on leaving care

During the mid-seventies and eighties, there was an extensive number of small scale surveys and qualitative studies, often carried out at a very local level, which have highlighted the range of problems faced by young people leaving care (see, for example, Godek,1976; Burgess,1981; Lupton, 1985; Stein and Carey,1986; First Key,1987; Barnardo’s, 1989, and
Bonnerjea, 1990) Collectively, these studies have contributed to a greater awareness of the difficulties faced by care leavers and were influential in creating the new leaving care duties and wider discretionary powers contained within the Children Act 1989. These same studies also drew attention to the fact that:

- The range of problems faced by young people leaving care cannot be divorced from the quality of their pre-care and in-care experiences;
- Care leavers are not a homogeneous group in terms of pre-care experiences, case histories, needs and abilities, or their cultural and ethnic backgrounds;
- Young people leaving care are likely to have undergone a weakening of links with family, friends and neighbourhood and, as a result, may experience isolation, loneliness, and a confusion of identity;
- Care leavers tend to have records of poor educational achievement and many leave care with no job and poor employment prospects;
- The services available to young people leaving care and the preparation they receive for this is highly variable.

During the 1990's a number of more substantive studies were undertaken, both in the UK and abroad, which both reinforced these earlier messages and allowed comparisons to be made with young people who had not been in care. Biehal et al (1995), for example, found that there were four main areas of contrast between care leavers and young people generally. These were:

- Young people leave care to live independently at a much earlier age than young people who are not in care;
- Young people leaving care have lower levels of educational attainment and post 16 participation rates than young people in the general population, which cannot be wholly attributed to the disadvantaged background and social origins of many care leavers (Cheung and Heath, 1994);
- Care leavers are more likely to be unemployed than other young people between the ages of 16 and 19: the vast majority of care leavers therefore live at or near the poverty line. As Stein and Wade (1999) comment, They struggle to survive and to make ends meet - and this affects their whole life.
- Consistent with other research (Garnett, 1992) young women in or leaving care are considerably more likely to experience parenthood between 16 and 19 than their counterparts in the general population.

Developing the theme that care leavers are not a homogeneous group but contain much diversity, Biehal et al (1995) and Stein and Wade (1999) draw attention to two particular groups of care leavers; black care leavers, and young people with special educational needs.
In relation to the former, the dearth of studies making comparisons between black and white young people is pointed out, as is the fact that only one study has had as its focus young black care leavers (Black and in Care, 1994). This study showed how lack of cultural knowledge affected black care leavers’ confidence and self-esteem, which became an additional burden at the time of leaving care. Consistent, too, with other research, Biehal and colleagues found that by far the largest group of black young people leaving care are of mixed heritage. Few differences were found between the care careers of these young people and those of young white people. On leaving care, they also had similar housing and employment careers, although post care they were slightly more likely to make good educational progress. Whilst the majority of these young people had experienced racist harassment and abuse, some expressed the view that they were accepted by neither black nor white communities.

With regard to young people with special needs, the situation is less clear. One recent study found that ten percent of looked after children had hearing impairments, nine percent had visual impairments, and eight percent had mobility problems (DoH, 1999a). In an earlier survey of care leavers (Broad, 1998), eight per cent had learning disabilities and just over one per cent had physical disabilities. However these figures are now considered to under-represent the overall number of care leavers with special needs (DoH, 1999b). The likelihood is that at least some of these young people will require continued support into adulthood, and may at best achieve situations of semi-independence.

In respect to special needs, as Stein and Wade (1999) point out, of no less significance is the research evidence that a very high proportion of young people referred to and looked after by social services departments (SSDs) have emotional and behavioural difficulties. In Biehal et al.’s study over half the young people with special needs were classified as emotionally or behaviourally disturbed. Compared to other young people in their survey sample, they had fewer educational qualifications, were more likely to be unemployed and were over-represented among the homeless.

Overall, then, as Stein and Wade (1999) have put it:

*The evidence from these studies shows that young people leaving care have to cope with the challenges and responsibilities of major changes in their lives - in leaving foster and residential care and setting up home, in leaving school and entering the world of work or, more likely, being unemployed and surviving on benefits, and in being parents - at a far younger age than other young people. In short, they have compressed and accelerated transitions to adulthood.*

**The situation in London**

There is also some evidence to suggest that in London these problems may be even more acute. In the past - although perhaps to a lesser extent now - young people, including those who have gone missing from care, have made their way to London. The capital also plays host to most unaccompanied asylum seeking minors. In 1998, there were 2,833 such new arrivals (DoH, 1999a), a figure which had risen to over 5,000 by April 2000 (Audit Commission, 2000). Most of these, an estimated 3,500, are supported by London Boroughs. Wyler (2000), for example, quotes the example of Kensington and Chelsea where 60 per cent of the 160 young people being dealt with by the borough’s Independence Support Team
entered the care system as asylum seekers some years ago (from countries such as Eritrea and Ethiopia) and more recently (from Bosnia and Kosovo).

More recently, the reports of the Social Exclusion Unit have pointed to the very high risk of social exclusion particularly for those leaving care in London: the report on *Rough Sleepers* estimated that between a quarter and a third of rough sleepers have been in public care, with a growing proportion coming from within the London area (SEU,1998). The SEU report on teenage pregnancy (SEU,1999) shows ten London boroughs as being among the areas with the highest level of teenage pregnancy. Likewise, while estimating that nine per cent of 16-18 year olds overall are not in education, work or training, the SEU report *Bridging the Gap* highlights that the proportions are considerably higher in Inner London and among particular vulnerable groups, such as care leavers.

*The number of care leavers*

Nationally some 8-9,000 young people leave care annually, almost 5,000 of them aged 16 or 17. Since 1993 there has been a small drop in the number of care leavers but whereas the proportion of young people leaving care on their 18th birthday has fallen, from 46 to 41 per cent, the proportion leaving aged 16 has increased from 33 to 40 per cent.

Providing detailed data on trends in the number and characteristics of young people leaving care in London presents problems. First the categories in which information is published has changed over the years. Second, the production of the Quality Protects Management Action Plans (MAPs) has highlighted some major discrepancies in the information on care leavers published by the Department of Health (from data supplied by the authorities) and that reported by the SSDs within these MAPs. This raises questions about the quality of available data and highlights the need for more robust management information systems within Social Services Departments.

Table 1.1 below gives the numbers of young people aged 16 or over reported as leaving the care of the 33 London boroughs for the years 1994 -1999. Table 1.2 ranks these same London boroughs according to the numbers of young people leaving care over the same years, 1 representing the borough with the highest number, and so forth.

The figures in Table 1 are somewhat difficult to interpret: individual authorities show some fluctuation across the years, the larger variation in Hillingdon, for example, being related to its proximity to Heathrow airport, and its greater accessibility by unaccompanied asylum seekers.

What all the authorities have in common is a fairly dramatic decrease in the number of young people leaving care in the last year for which figures are available. It could be that some of this decrease might be attributable to authorities being more likely to hold young people beyond their 16th birthday in the light of forthcoming legislation. On the other hand, it may also represent a decrease in earlier years of the number of young people being admitted to care.

*Tracking progress in Children’s services: an evaluation of local responses to the Quality Protects Programme* reports on SSD’s predictions of the future number of care leavers. This suggests a significant increase in 16 and 17 year olds in care by 2002. However, the
evaluation of the MAPs suggests that local authorities are ‘probably underestimating the impact of policy on care leavers by a factor of three or more’ (DoH, 2000)

Table 1.1: Number of care leavers aged 16 plus in years ending March 1994-1999

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**Totals** | 1256 | 1173 | 1476 | 1623 | 1569 | 829

Source: DoH Children Looked After by Local Authorities
### Table 1.2 London boroughs rank ordered by number of young people leaving care in the years ending March 1994-1999

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Table 1.2 shows the emergence of a number of patterns. For example, over the past three years at least, seven London boroughs have consistently been amongst the ten boroughs with the highest actual number of young people leaving care and several of these are adjacent to each other: Westminster, Wandsworth, Lewisham, Southwark, Lambeth, Newham and Brent.

Indeed, most authorities show a very consistent ranking across the six years. This is not the case for all however. Boroughs such as Barking and Camden for example report fairly
consistent numbers of young people leaving care, yet one has a consistent ranking, the other does not. Bromley and Bexley are other interesting examples. In the case of the latter, a not dramatically lower number of discharges in 1996, led to a much more substantial change in ranking that same year. In contrast, both the figures and the rankings for Bromley change significantly over the period. A possible interpretation of these variations is that whilst this is the only, and very limited, comparative data available on leaving care in London, it may also not be very reliable.

The policy context

At the time of the Audit and Assessment, the powers and duties of local authorities in relation to leaving care were those defined within the Children Act 1989, which came into operation in 1991. In July 1999, new plans in relation to care leavers were launched by the government for consultation. ‘Me, Survive, Out There?’ proposed strengthening the duties of local authorities in relation to care leavers as a basis for new legislation. The Children (Leaving Care) Bill was subsequently introduced into Parliament in November 1999, and expected to be implemented in April 2001. This requires local authorities to assess and meet the needs of care leavers up to the age of 18, to draw up a pathway plan, and appoint a Young Person’s Advisors, for each young person. The Bill will also require local authorities to keep in touch with them until they reach the age of 21, or latter if they are still being helped with full time education or training. In addition, local authorities will be required to provide general assistance for these young people, in cash or in kind, until they are 21, and to assist with employment, education and training. The duty to assist with education and training will last for as long as the young person is pursuing their agreed programme, even if it takes them past the age of 21. Mindful of these imminent changes, most London boroughs - at the time of the Audit - were planning, and in the early stages of introducing, quite fundamental changes to the way in which they deliver services to care leavers.

Simultaneously, the Government’s Objectives for Children’s Social Services identified care leavers as a priority group. A Key Objective is:

To ensure that young people leaving care, as they enter adulthood, are not isolated and participate socially and economically as citizens.

(DoH, 1999)

In turn, this Key Objective is to be met by three sub-objectives:

- For young people who were looked after at the age of 16 to maximise the number engaged in education, training or employment at the age of 19;

- To maximise the number of young people leaving care after their 16th birthday who are still in touch with social services, or a known and approved contact, on their 19th birthday;

- To maximise the number of young people leaving care on or after their 16th birthday who have suitable accommodation.
A further element of this initiative, known as *Quality Protects*, is the allocation of the Children’s Services Special Grant, of £375 million payable from April 1999 to March 2002. Increasing the support provided for care leavers is one of six priority areas on which local authorities must spend the grant. This assistance has been widely used by authorities in assessing the steps they need to take in moving leaving care services forward.

A review of available MAPs, the Management Action Plans required annually of local authorities detailing how they intend to meet the Government’s objectives and on which the payment of the grant is based, shows that in general this support has been used in three main ways: to employ additional staff; to introduce management information systems; to consult with young people in preparation for the new legislation.

It should also be the case that leaving care services will benefit from other aspects of the Quality Protects Initiative. Bearing in mind the importance placed by research findings on the quality of young people’s pre- and in-care experience, the Quality Protects Initiative’s emphasis on, for example, continuity of placement and the education of looked after children will be of benefit to those who will be the care leavers of the future.

In the course of the *Audit and Assessment*, further additional developments of relevance occurred. In April 2000, ‘Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and Their Families’, was published by three central government departments: the Department of Health, the Department for Education and Employment, and the Home Office. This new framework has significant lessons for how individual young people’s needs are assessed, and met, by SSDs but also provides a foundation of policy and practice for all professionals and agencies that manage and provide services for children and young people in need.

Also published in April 2000 was the Government’s *Connexions* strategy. The *Connexions* Service set up by this strategy is another cross-departmental initiative which comprises a new support service for all young people ages 13-19, whereby each young person will be provided with access to a Personal Advisor. The *Connexions* strategy also aims to:

- Give all young people access to the highest standard of education and training and give them the best possible support in the transition from adolescence to adulthood;
- Offer financial support to encourage young people to stay in learning and a new youth smart card to reward learning by offering discounts on travel, local leisure amenities and on things young people want to buy;
- Develop opportunities for learning outside school; and
- Make proposals for consultation on a new and inclusive recognition of young people’s achievement in school, college and the community.

Separately, in April 1999 the Government set up the *Rough Sleepers Unit* with the goal of reducing the number of people sleeping rough in England by two thirds by April 2002. The Unit’s strategy built on analysis and research by the Social Exclusion Unit, which found that between a quarter and a third of people sleeping rough had been looked after by local authorities as children. Prevention of future rough sleeping is a key element of the Rough Sleepers Unit’s strategy, identifying the specific problems faced by groups at risk of sleeping
rough and developing effective responses to them will be a vital to ensure a sustainable reduction in rough sleeper numbers.

The policy context at the time of the Audit and Assessment could be characterised as conscious efforts being made to improve services not just to care leavers but to all young people. Viewed from this perspective, this study might be seen as providing as a baseline from which the care leaving services of the future might be gauged.

The Audit and Assessment of leaving care services in London

The Audit and Assessment was jointly commissioned by the Department of Health and the Rough Sleepers Unit of DETR, in November 1999. The overall aim of the six-month project was to provide a basis for developing services to young people leaving local authority care in London. Broadly it has sought to do this by:

- Auditing the range of services for care leavers available from the London boroughs;
- Assessing the effectiveness of London local authorities in delivering a coordinated programme of support to care leavers and, in particular, meeting their needs for suitable accommodation;
- Ascertaining the views of London care leavers;
- Producing a report which describes leaving care services in London and which is informed by the views of those planning, providing and receiving such services, and which identifies what is seen as good practice and how services may be improved.

Given the timescales of the project, the Audit and Assessment is clearly not an evaluation of leaving care services in London. Rather it attempts to paint a picture of the services that are available to care leavers, the attributes that are most valued by those that use them, and the processes thought to be most effective in delivering this and achieving better outcomes. On the basis of previous research, it was agreed that the main themes of the research should be:

- Preparation and readiness to leave care

What are the policies, procedures and practices of SSDs’ in preparing young people? What resources are devoted to this? How comprehensive is the preparation that young people receive? Does it include practical skills, personal and social development, emotional health, sex and relationships etc? How prepared do young people feel? What do they see as useful preparation, in what areas do they feel least prepared and what else would they like to have covered?

- Multi-agency assessment

What protocols or arrangements exist for multi agency assessments? How specific are these to leaving care arrangements? Which agencies are involved; which staff, at what levels. Are
there barriers to multi-agency assessment? From the care leavers perspective, how well-coordinated are the different agencies in assessing their needs?

- **Personal support**

What form of personal support do young people find most helpful? What do they not want? What support do they usually receive, from whom? Does each young person have an identified person to offer or coordinate support for them? Do they have a say in choosing their main source of support? Do professional agencies help young people to help each other? To what extent are families supported to enable them to offer support, as appropriate to their children.

- **Financial support**

What levels and sources of financial support are currently available for young care leavers? How is information on this communicated to young people? What help do young people think might be useful in helping them maximise and manage their financial resources? What help did they receive?

- **Opportunities and support in education/training/employment**

What are the expectations and aspirations of care leavers in respect of education, training or employment? How do they think they can best be helped to achieve their aspirations? What links are made to other agencies? What arrangements have been made in respect of young people with special educational needs?

- **Suitable accommodation**

Does the local authority have an accommodation strategy that ensures it has access to the full range of suitable accommodation as defined in the QP targets? Does this take account of the particular needs of some groups such as young parents? What forms of accommodation are currently being used by those leaving care? Are these considered suitable? Are there barriers to accessing the accommodation of choice? How can these be removed? What forms of accommodation do young people prefer, for what reasons? How successful do they consider SSDs are at providing suitable accommodation? How much choice do care leavers have and is this as much as they want? Which forms of communication prove most sustainable? Are the reasons for this understood?

- **Monitoring progress and outcomes**

What systems are in place for monitoring the progress of young people as they are prepared for leaving care and after they leave? How successful are these? What are the gaps? How well do agencies coordinate their information?

- **Consultation with care leavers**

What mechanisms are in place for consulting young people, both in decisions that affect them individually and in the planning and delivery of the service? Which are felt to work best? What mechanisms are in place to consult with young people where there may be communication difficulties, for example, people for whom English is not a first language, or
who may have learning difficulties? How are the results from these consultations used? How are they fed back to the young people?

All these issues are important and their success closely inter-related. However in the Audit and Assessment more emphasis was given to accommodation: how young people’s accommodation needs are identified, provided for and supported, how they relate to other issues and impact on the young person’s sense of well-being.

Method

In order to address these issues, a six-part research design was adopted. This included:

- **Analysis of current and planned service provision**

Already existing information, including DoH statistical returns and QP MAPs, was collected and analysed.

- **Postal questionnaires to senior managers in all 33 London boroughs**

The purpose of these was to collect quantitative information on the services, policies and procedures in respect of social work services to care leavers, addressing each of the issues outlined above. Two authorities declined to complete the questionnaire but did agree to be interviewed as below.

- **Interviews with lead officers for leaving care in all SSDs**

These allowed for more detailed and qualitative follow up on the issues identified through the questionnaire and on the themes identified above. Several of these interviews extended to two hours and, for the most part, a central focus was accommodation.

- **Interviews with one other agency involved with care leavers in each LA**

The respondent in each SSD was asked to identify an important partner or external contact. Twenty six such interviews were conducted, mostly with personnel in the housing field who had experience of working with a range of London authorities.

- **Interviews with service providers**

Services for care leavers are sometimes contracted out, in whole or in part, to specialist private and voluntary agencies. In London, only one borough contracts out its leaving care services in any substantial manner. However, a number of the major child care charities, as well as housing associations, do offer specialist services for care leavers. Interviews with senior staff of these agencies were conducted concerning the services they offered and their perceptions of the effectiveness of local authorities.

- **The views of care leavers**
It had been hoped to interview in excess of 100 young people in groups in the course of the Audit and Assessment. Regrettably this did not prove possible. Some authorities were reluctant to organise this on our behalf; in others the number of young people who turned up at the appointed time of the group was considerably less than anticipated. A number of reasons appear to have contributed to this including: SSDs themselves were organising consultation events; young people’s experience of consultation was not positive; some young people are anxious about participating in groups.

Ultimately, 57 young people took part in the research. One group of 37 young people was accessed through SSDs and comprised young people getting ready to leave care, as well as some who had already left. Some of these participated in a group discussion; all completed or were assisted in completing a short questionnaire. A further group of 18 care leavers was accessed via youth homelessness agencies such as London Connection and Centrepoint. Each of these young people was personally interviewed using a slightly modified version of the above questionnaire. All young people invited to participate in the research were informed that they would receive a small reward for their participation. Those who did participate made clear their view of the importance of young people being informed about the subsequent outcome of the project.

**Structure of the report**

Each of the following six sections of the report concentrates on one of the themes identified above. Section 2 looks at consultation with young people and includes consideration of how SSDs are addressing this issue, as well as at the broad results of the Audit and Assessment’s consultation with young people. The following section describes the way in which local authorities in London organise their leaving care services. Section 4 focuses on accommodation. In Sections 5, 6 and 7 the emphasis is on support in relation to education, training and employment, financial and personal support. In the final section, Section 8, the main messages of the project are summarised and consideration given to their implications for the future development of leaving care services in London and more widely.
2. Consultation with young people/young people’s views

Following the lead of the commercial sector, user involvement in the planning of public services has long been advocated. The Children Act 1989 enshrined in legislation for the first time the principle that children and young people should be consulted with regard to the decisions and plans being made about them. This is more a specific application of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by the UK government in 1991. Article 12 of the Convention, exhorts government to assure to children the right to express their views on all matters affecting them. Of particular relevance to care leavers are the Government’s Objectives for Children’s Social Services (DoH 1999), which requires SSD’s ‘to actively involve users and carers in planning services and in tailoring individual packages of care’.

This section examines how SSDs in London are addressing this issue in relation to young people who are preparing to leave care or who have recently done so. It does this by describing first how SSDs attempt to involve young people individually in decisions about their own future; and secondly at how they seek to involve them more strategically in the planning and delivery of services. The section also asks how satisfied SSDs are with current procedures, at measures taken to include young people with communication difficulties, and at how the results of consultations are fed back to young people. Research has identified the existence of a number of particularly vulnerable groups: the section looks at SSDs knowledge of these. It concludes with a broad outline of the views of the young people consulted in the course of the Audit and Assessment.

Consultation with individual young people

Where SSDs answered the question on consultation with individual young people, they tended to do so in very brief terms. A few respondents made reference in this context to pathway plans and/or leaving care plans. However, by far the most common response was to refer to statutory reviews and ongoing discussion between the young person and the social worker. Typical in this respect was the following statement:

Young people are always encouraged to attend their statutory reviews. In addition they have access to their social worker with whom they can raise any issues of concern.

In interview, however, it was not uncommon for SSD representatives to raise the topic of the high number of unallocated cases in their area and to highlight that they have difficulty in maintaining contact with certain groups of difficult or vulnerable young care leavers. These particular groups are discussed subsequently. The point is that there is a strong likelihood that, at least a significant minority of young people are not involved in planning about their future. Notwithstanding this, as Table 2.1 shows, most SSDs expressed relative satisfaction with the extent of young people’s involvement in individual planning.
Table 2.1 SSD satisfaction with young people’s involvement in individual planning

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<td>61</td>
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In interview, several SSD respondents also referred to the fact that the appointment of Independent Reviewing Officers had greatly facilitated both reviews taking place at appropriate intervals, and young people’s participation in them. A number of other SSDs commented that they were intending to make similar appointments for these reasons. It may be that the drawing up and review of proposed pathway plans would benefit from a similar type of arrangement. However, other research evidence suggests that young people’s experience of participation in decision-making is far from positive (Sinclair, 1998).

**Consultation with young people about the planning and delivery of services**

While SSD respondents described, at considerable length, the attempts they had made to involve young people strategically, as Table 2.2 illustrates, they appear nonetheless, to be less satisfied with this aspect of involving young people. This is in contrast to the findings from the evaluation of QP MAPs 2, which reports that fewer SSD’s were good at involving individual children in decisions than involving children in the design and delivery of services. In that respect nearly half of all authorities were evaluated as good or very good. Westminster was given special mention for their collaboration with First Key in establishing contacts with care leavers (DoH, 2000)

Table 2.2 SSD satisfaction with young people’s involvement in the planning and delivery of services

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<td>9</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
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For most SSDs, involving care leavers in the strategic dimension was a relatively recent development, and for others it was something to which they were just beginning to turn their attention. A range of activities were reported: a couple of authorities already had a system of consultation which comprised exit interviews with all care leavers; an annual care leavers—
conference and other events; others had held a one-off event in the past six months; others were only at the stage of planning such an event.

Some authorities had involved external consultants: occasionally this was done as a one-off enterprise, the emphasis being on the independent status of the consultation; sometimes it was intended as a forerunner to the setting up of the department’s own system of consultation, and sometimes it involved the external consultant training young people to undertake subsequent consultation. Some SSDs also made the point that although they had involved care leavers, it was not necessarily in relation to care leaving services but to issues of being looked after more generally.

Appendix 2.1 attempts to give a flavour of the ways in which SSDs were addressing this issue.

As one respondent commented:

*We have done quite a few things in this area and that has all proved very useful. But what we would really like is a proper strategy for consulting care leavers.*

Three more general issues emerged from the interviews:

- The need for a consultation strategy
- Who should lead in consultations?
- The increasing role of Children’s Rights Officers

Although there was much evidence of activity to consult with the young people, there was less evidence that authorities had developed clear strategies to plan and coordinate this in a purposeful way.

Questions were raised about the appropriateness of SSD personnel leading on the consultation. The decision to appoint external consultants was in part related to this: they were considered not only to be independent, but to offer an expertise in facilitating young people’s involvement - an expertise which it was acknowledged social work staff did not have. It was for similar reasons that some departments were seeking to involve the Youth Service in consultations. As one respondent put it:

*I’m not convinced that social workers have the skills to consult young people - to really involve them. The Youth Service on the other hand has an excellent track record of working alongside young people, of getting them involved.*

The appointment of a Children’s Rights Officer, usually a collaborative arrangement with one of the large national child care charities was seen by some departments, as a significant development in their consultation with young people. Interviews were conducted with a small number of these individuals.
A common theme to emerge from these interviews was the difficulty experienced by these workers in achieving substantial change in policy and practice beyond that which affected an individual young person. It appeared that despite raising common issues in annual reports, seeking meetings with senior managers and feedback sessions with practitioners, few Children’s Rights Officers felt they were able to exert much influence on the planning and delivery of services generally. Clearly, this appears to be an avenue which could be more productively exploited and it seems somewhat paradoxical that some departments placed so much emphasis on a service which they themselves did not appear to listen to.

**Overcoming barriers to communication**

SSDs were asked whether their methods of consulting young people included particular strategies to reach those who had communication difficulties, such as those with special educational needs or those whose first language was not English. Table 2.3 summarises their responses:

**Table 2.3 In consulting young people, do SSDs take account of those with communication difficulties**

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</tbody>
</table>

The respondents, who reported that did take account of those with communication difficulties, were asked to describe the methods they used. Only three of the 15 replied. Set alongside the rather mixed picture to emerge from Table 2.3, this would suggest that more work needs to be undertaken in this area. It is also significant to point out that leaving care services in London do not always have responsibility for all young people with disabilities. Most of those with significant disabilities are dealt with, even in relation to leaving care, by a specialist Children with Disabilities team.

In the course of discussing other interview themes, however, a substantial number of respondents did refer to the difficulty of delivering services to young people with moderate, or more particularly, borderline moderate learning difficulties. Concern was likewise expressed that the proportion of these young people appeared to be increasing. There would appear to be a case for learning more about the specific needs of these young people, as well as how they might best be assisted in participating in the planning of services at both an individual and more strategic level.

**Mechanisms for feedback**

Quite appropriately, if young people are to be asked their views as users of services and are to be consulted on the future development of these services, they should likewise have feedback
on the outcomes of these consultations. Appendix 2.1 shows that few authorities have
developed formal feedback mechanisms of this type. Table 2.4 summarises in more detail the
ways in which SSDs described how they fed back the results of consultations.

Table 2.4 How SSDs feed back the results of consultations with and to young people*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbally/individually only</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minutes of meetings, written reports, 1 to 1 discussions</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young person’s magazine/newsletter</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through Young Person’s Forum (Already existing or to be set up)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents'/service users meeting</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Rights Officer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Some respondents didn’t answer the question; others gave replies in more than one of the
above categories.

Access to several documents covering specific consultation exercises showed that these
tended to read as summaries of young people’s views on specific themes covered. As several
young people pointed out, this is not the same as relaying back to young people the results of
the consultation: quite appropriately young people see the value of consultation as lying in
the change it implies may occur.

The experience of many of those young people who contributed to the Audit and Assessment
was that consultation does not lead to change, and it left them questioning the value of
participating in further consultation exercises. It may well be that young people’s perception
of the speed of the process of change is unrealistic. However, their experience of the process
of participation to date poses challenges which need to be addressed for the future.

**Care leavers with particular needs**

Previous research has pointed out that some young care leavers will have particular needs and
suggested that the following four groups merit special attention: young people with
disabilities; young people who are black or from minority ethnic groups; young asylum
seekers, and young people who are pregnant or parents. SSDs were therefore asked about
these young people’s needs and about their awareness of the numbers of these young people
in their leaving care population. Each is discussed separately.

**Young people with disabilities**

As previously mentioned it was unusual for SSDs’ leaving care teams to deal with young
people with disabilities. In the main, then, respondents tended to say that they were unaware
of these young people’s particular needs, with only a few adding that this was something they
knew they had to look into in more detail. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, the vast majority of
SSDs (26) stated that they did not know the number of care leavers who had disabilities. Four
of the remaining departments stated that they were only able to give crude estimates - percentages which ranged between two and 20 per cent. The remaining three authorities gave numbers which ranged between 3 and 12.

**Young people who are black or from ethnic minority groups**

Rather more London boroughs provided statistics on the numbers of young people who had left care in the past and who were black or from minority ethnic groups, only ten providing no information, or stating that such information was not available. In a further small department, there had been no discharges in the previous year. Otherwise eight departments gave precise numbers ranging from 1 to 23, with only two stating the number as a proportion of all young people leaving care. Fourteen departments provided a percentage figure, seven of these stating this was an estimate only. As Table 2.5 shows, these percentage figures ranged from nine to 77 percent. These highly incomplete figures probably reflect quite different minority ethnic populations in London boroughs.

**Table 2.5: Reported percentages of young people from black and minority ethnic groups**

- Approximately 10%: 3
- Approximately 18%: 1
- Approximately 50%: 5
- Approximately 75%: 5

These figures fail to take account of different ethnic minority populations, the degree to which young people are of mixed heritage or how they themselves would define their ethnicity. The clear lack of accurate figures on this subject could suggest a corresponding lack of attention to the question of race and ethnicity. This tended to be borne out when respondents were asked about the needs of this particular group of care leavers. With the exception of two authorities, all boroughs responded in terms of asylum seeking young people. In one of these two authorities, attention was drawn to the need to be careful not to place young people in permanent accommodation in parts of the borough known for racist activity; in the case of the other authority, attention was drawn to the difficulties involved in trying to engage young men from an African-Caribbean background.

Collectively, these findings suggest that considerably more work needs to be undertaken in relation to the twin issues of race and ethnic background and identity. Clear starting points would be better information systems and consultation with young people themselves.

**Young people who are pregnant or parents**

Insofar as this group was concerned, SSDs respondents were much more likely to discuss the needs of the young people concerned, and indeed to raise these spontaneously. These needs tended to focus on the question of accommodation, of isolation and loneliness, of contact with families and on the dilemma for SSDs of combining support of the young person and supervision of parenting capacities. However, the focus was almost exclusively on single young women, little reference being made to their partners nor indeed to young care leavers as fathers.
Once more, departments were rarely able to provide reliable statistical information on this subject. For example, 14 boroughs did not reply to this question or stated that the information was not currently available. A further eight provided raw numbers, ranging from 0-19, with only two describing these as estimates. A further nine provided percentages ranging from 2-20 per cent, six of these being described as estimates.

**Young asylum seekers**

Over half the London boroughs were unable to provide statistics on the number of young asylum seekers leaving care in the previous year. Of those who did respond, eight stated that they were able to provide estimates only. Figures provided ranged from 1 to 36 and percentages cited from four to 45. Discussion of the needs of young asylum seekers tended to focus on how SSDs dealt with these young people (some had specialist Asylum Seekers Teams) and the difficulties that they pose, in terms of resources, for individual departments. Only one department reported a specific initiative to assist such young people - a regular, activity-based self-help group. On the other hand, several highlighted the educational motivation of many such young people from Ethiopia and Eritrea. It was also suggested that these young people’s presence in the care system had served to dramatically improve the authority’s statistics in relation to the educational achievement of looked after children and it was reported that several were - or had been - supported in higher education. It was also reported that regrettably, owing to pressure of numbers, services to this group of young people was now having to be reviewed.

These findings do not present a very positive picture of the way in which London boroughs are taking account of the findings of previous research. Of particular concern is the relative absence of information systems which enable SSDs to quantify the numbers of young people concerned: such information is an essential pre-requisite to planning the services to meet these young people’s needs. Several authorities reported substantial new investment in information systems (essentially through funding available through the Quality Protects Initiative) across the whole looked after system. In addition, several had plans for stand-alone leaving care statistical systems. This is a positive development, although none of these seemed, as yet, to be operating smoothly. It seems likely that advice on the type of information to be recorded would be welcome, as otherwise there is a danger of departments, individually, attempting to reinvent the wheel. There must also be a concern about the apparent lack of awareness of the particular needs of these groups of care leavers, and the relative absence of initiatives to address these.

**Young people’s perspectives**

As mentioned in the previous section, interviews were conducted with two sets of young people: 39 who were accessed via SSDs, and 18 who were accessed through youth homelessness agencies.

It is not clear how representative those in the former group are of young people being dealt with by leaving care teams: what can be said is that they were care leavers who were in contact with leaving care services. In contrast, the young people accessed through homelessness agencies were those who, for one reason or another, had lost contact with their SSD sometimes well in advance of the stage at which they might be expected to leave care.
As such, these young people might be described as those who had slipped through the net of leaving care services.

**Young people in touch with SSDs**

Of the 39 young people who participated in discussion groups:

- 27 were female (69 per cent) and 12 male (31 per cent);
- Three were 16 or under (7 per cent), 15 were 17-18 year olds (38 per cent), 16 were in the range 19-21 (41 per cent), and five were over 21 years (13 per cent);
- 24 described themselves as Black UK, Caribbean, Asian or African (63 per cent); 11 as white UK (29 per cent), and 3 as mixed race (7 per cent);
- 11 described themselves as unemployed (28 per cent) and the remainder were involved on a full- or part-time basis in further or higher education, training scheme or employment: only one was still at school;
- Three reported having been previously homeless.

Their responses are summarised below.

**Readiness to leave care**

The young people were asked whether they worried or had worried about leaving care and how ready they felt they were/had been.

**Figure 2.1 The amount of worry young people express towards leaving care who a) have left care b) are about to leave care**

As the charts above show, perhaps not surprisingly, the younger ones were less likely to report being worried than were the older ones. Indeed, several of this latter group commented
that they had worried a great deal about leaving care but that they would not have admitted it at the time. They also tended to comment that they had been less ready to leave care than they had thought at the time. The things young people worried about were:

**Not being able to cope without any support from social services; being able to cope with my bills.**

**Just the fact that I would be living on my own - coming home to an empty house**

**I felt like it was a big step. I didn’t know what people I was going to live with, or how it was going to be living on my own**

**Being independent, coping financially while I was studying.**

**Not having no parents and love and affection. I was abandoned once and then again at the age of 18**

**Help from social services**

These were of course young people who remained in some degree of contact with SSDs. They were asked to describe how helpful they had found social services and the sorts of things that they thought they should be given information and advice about.

**Figure 2 How helpful were Social Services in helping you with leaving care?**

* a) left care                                   b) about to leave care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>very helpful</th>
<th>quite helpful</th>
<th>neither</th>
<th>quite unhelpful</th>
<th>very unhelpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>left care</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>about to leave care</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 30 -
As the above charts show, about a third of those who had already left care and of those who were yet to do so had found social services very or quite helpful. However, substantially more of those who had left care - perhaps with the benefit of hindsight - reported finding social services very unhelpful. Significantly, too, almost a quarter of those who were preparing to leave care and over a third of those who had already done so described social services as being neither helpful nor unhelpful.

The following quotations give a flavour of those topics young people identified as being ones on which they would like more information and advice:

*Contraception, safe sex, decorating. I had courses on things like that from the Housing Association: I looked forward to them and made new friends there that I still keep up with.*

*What are the experiences I will face when I have left: friends, hazards.*

*Being mixed race and my culture needs of being black; staying away from my family.*

*Hobbies, interests of young people, your rights while in care.*

*What to be prepared for in general, coping with the area you live in. Living on your own.*

*Managing who you bring back home/friends.*

*STDs, bills, how to cope; what to expect - the reality.*

**What information would be helpful**

Following on from this young people were asked to suggest what they thought were the three most important pieces of information/advice that young people leaving care should be given. As the following quotations highlight money, accommodation, practical skills and inter-personal relationships featured strongly:

1. *How to combat loneliness - use friends/family as a resource for emotional and practical support;*
2. *Send them on cookery/budgeting/decorating courses;*

1. *Be aware of who your friends are;*
2. *Know what your resources are;*
3. *Remember never to view prospective accommodation on your own and speak up!*

1. *How to manage money;*
2. *Future education/jobs;*
3. *Housing.*
1. Social life - not to mess with certain people;
2. Keeping on top financially;
3. That they are not alone

1. Should be told how to deal properly with money;
2. How to deal with loneliness once you are by yourself;
3. Not to panic!

1. Benefits;
2. Accommodation;
3. Support

Suggestions for change

They were also asked to specify up to three things that they would change if they were in charge of leaving care services. Many suggestions were made: budgeting, driving lessons, choice and quality in accommodation etc. However, by far the most frequently cited changes all related to the young persons’ relationship with social services. For example,

Make sure social workers have regular contact with clients and monitor their progress - even when clients don’t have a social worker, there should be a telephone number you can ring.

And social workers taking you out - to restaurant, cinema, shopping

Have a deputy social worker for each child that has also had personal contact with the child as well

Social workers who listen to you more

There should be an emergency number at the carer service

SSD should keep you longer than 18.

Homeless young people who had been looked after

Of these 18 young people:

- 14 were male (78 per cent), four female (22 per cent);
- Two were under 18 (11 per cent), six were in the age range 19-21 (33 per cent), and 10 were aged over 21 (56 per cent);
- One described himself as African/Caribbean, the remainder as white;
- All had previously been in care, nine to London boroughs: only one had spent one year in care, five had spent up to three years in care; the remainder had been in care for more than four years and included one young person who had spent 15 years in care. Another young person in this category had been adopted at two but,
after being sexually abused by her adoptive father, had spent between the age of 13-17 in a children’s home before being placed in B&B.

• None were in education, training or employment and some reported having spent considerable periods of time sleeping rough: four had being doing so for three months; a further four maintained they had been sleeping rough between one and four years, and the remainder (10) had spent between 4 and 11 years intermittently homeless/in custody/sleeping rough.

These young people were clearly those who had fallen through the existing safety nets of the care system: several had run away from care placements and gone missing; several reported abuse not just before care but whilst in care; virtually all had had a drug problem; several had had episodes of self-harm or had attempted suicide, and one young man had travelled extensively in Europe on the basis of prostitution. A substantial number volunteered that they chose to sleep rough in preference to the alternative of being placed in a hostel.

Of those who had remained in care, several acknowledged that they had not been concerned about leaving. As one said,

\[No \ I \ wasn't \ worried \ - \ I \ was \ excited \ - \ I \ thought \ it \ would \ be \ wonderful.\]

This young man then went on to explain how he recognises now that he had been unrealistic:

\[They \ did \ try \ to \ tell \ me \ - \ but \ I \ wouldn't \ listen. \ I \ thought \ it \ would \ be \ great \ and \ I \ would \ be \ able \ to \ manage. \ I \ couldn't \ wait \ to \ see \ the \ back \ of \ them \ (SSD). \ They \ just \ nagged, \ nagged, \ nagged. \ But \ it \ was \ me \ who \ had \ to \ change.\]

Others painted a picture of being left to cope alone with very little support - or support which they found inappropriate. As one put it:

\[What's \ the \ point \ in \ teaching \ you \ how \ to \ cook \ when \ you \ don't \ know \ how \ to \ do \ the \ shopping!\]

Many of the suggestions that these young people made about the type of information and advice that should be available to care leavers were similar to those who had remained in touch with social services. There were, however, some significant additions. The following, for example, were typical of suggestions made by at least five of these young people:

\[Tell \ them \ about \ drugs \ and \ about \ dodgy \ people \ they \ could \ meet\]

\[Get \ them \ a \ place \ to \ stay \ or \ get \ them \ in \ with \ their \ family\]

\[Have \ faith \ in \ young \ people \ – \ don’t \ cut \ them \ off - \ hang \ in \ there \ with \ them\]

\[The \ social \ worker \ should \ come \ to \ you \ once \ a \ week - \ sit \ with \ you \ for \ an \ hour, \ talk \ through \ how \ you’re \ getting \ on - benefits, \ work, \ housing.\]
Don’t follow in any one’s shadow - leave the past behind – don’t be angry and bitter - but you need support to do this, there needs to be a plan to help you get ready.

Information about the big wide world.

The messages from young people

None of the messages from young people are complex. Neither are they new: they have been repeated in numerous consultation exercises with those who have left care. Doubtless, too, some are messages which social workers, foster carers and residential staff do try to convey to young people; others are messages for social workers, foster carers and residential staff. They can perhaps be distilled to the following:

• In contrast to other young people, care leavers have not always been given the same opportunities to absorb the messages, to make mistakes and start again;

• The tendency has been to place the onus on young people to seek help, rather than being there alongside them to talk through difficulties and offer practical and emotional support;

• Who is the best messenger?

The proposed legislative changes in the Children (Leaving Care) Bill, once implemented, should do much to address the first of these two issues. Insofar as the third is concerned, it was clear from the discussion groups that care leavers are able to get a considerable amount of support from one another. A further possibility, which might therefore be considered by local authorities, is to ensure that young people preparing to leave care have the opportunity to discuss this transition in their life with other young people who have already experienced it. Whilst care and attention would have to be given to ensuring that this was done in a constructive and positive manner for all the young people concerned, it is an approach which seems worthy of consideration at both an individual and a group level and which has the potential to provide care leavers with a sense of worth about their experience.

Concluding remarks

This section has looked at the progress being made in consulting young people about the process of leaving care: how young people are involved in decisions about themselves, and how their views are used to influence the planning and delivery of services. It has likewise reported the views of a range of young people: those preparing to leave care, those who have left care but are still in some form of contact with their SSD, and those who have become homeless post-care.

The section shows that for SSDs consultation with care leavers is now on the agenda but is still at a very early stage of development. There is much yet to be done in terms of ensuring that the outputs of consultations are translated into revisions of policy and practice which are visible to young people. The interviews with young care leavers
further show a remarkable consistency in young people's perspectives, if not experiences, of leaving care.

The section also serves to highlight the complex range of needs of care leavers: a roof over their heads; means of survival for the present and the future and the need for practical skills in coping with these; extensive social and emotional needs in coming to terms with the past, dealing with the present and thinking ahead to the future.

It would be foolhardy to view this as other than a complex task. Neither practitioners nor managers were helped in planning this task by the lack of reliable information about their population of care leavers or about particular groups within that population. In each of the next five sections, a specific dimension of this task is considered.
### APPENDIX 2.1: Consultation with care leavers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authority</th>
<th>Externally commissioned</th>
<th>Internally undertaken</th>
<th>Formal feedback mechanism</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Newsletter planned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Young people’s conference held</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Consultation planned with young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td>Use of theatre group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Developing consultation/newsletter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>External commission being explored</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td>v</td>
<td>Conference held, newsletter planned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td>Care leavers’ Forum planned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td>Annual user survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td>Establishing a consultation group</td>
</tr>
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<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being planned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>v</td>
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<td>v</td>
<td>Existing exit interviews/surveys; planning wider consultation framework</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>v</td>
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<td>Open forum for young people</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>v</td>
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<td>To be planned</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>Previously undertaken, strategy planned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>Annual consultation/newsletter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>None recently, but a lot of user participation in training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Use social activities/shared house meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>Young people extensively involved</td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td>LAC Forum</td>
</tr>
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<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>Covers LAC generally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Described as limited at present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Described as needing revision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Occasional surveys on special topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td>‘Strategy’ being developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td>To be developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>Well established user participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>Well established user participation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Supporting young people

With growing recognition of the needs of care leavers, the past two decades have seen SSDs across the country develop specialist leaving care services. As Stein and Wade (1999) point out, however, this has been a somewhat piecemeal development. Leaving care services vary extensively in form and content and, as yet, attempts to evaluate the impact of such schemes on subsequent outcomes for young people are still at a very early stage. This section describes how London boroughs were organising care leaving services at the time of the Audit and Assessment. What emerges is a picture of considerable change as departments sought to prepare themselves for the implementation of the Children (Leaving Care) Bill in 2001. Most departments were in the process of moving from one form of arrangement to another but had not yet reached this final stage.

As well as describing these planned changes, this section examines the thinking behind them, whether departments had leaving care policies, and effectiveness of the services available to date, as perceived by the respondents. The section also looks at arrangements for assessing young peoples readiness to leave care and at how their progress is monitored. Acknowledging that all these aspects were in the process of change, the section therefore represents a baseline from which it might be possible subsequently to assess how services have developed.

The organisation of leaving care services

Most London boroughs have had some form of specific and/or specialist leaving care service in operation for several years. For many this has essentially been an after-care service where the intention was that young people would be introduced to the leaving care team by their social workers prior to moving to independent or semi-independent accommodation. The leaving care team did not have statutory responsibility for the youngsters and, this being the case, were frequently unqualified social workers, often ex-residential staff redeployed to after care with the closure of children’s homes. Their role was to be available for young people who sought their support, and in the main they offered practical support in relation to finance and to accommodation. They did not tend therefore to have a caseload, to keep records of the work they were undertaking, or actively follow-up young people leaving care. In some departments, the work was undertaken on a one-to-one basis; in others a drop-in facility was available and/or some group work was provided on selected topics. As one manager put it:

I suppose we became more aware of the needs of care leavers in the eighties and that’s when the Leaving Care Team first became established. It wasn’t so much that we put resources into it - resources became available from elsewhere and we thought we’d use them there - we knew there was a gap and it was left to the workers to get on with it. We always meant to do more - to go back and revisit care leavers - we knew there was more to be done - but it was just one of these things
that we didn’t get round to. It wasn’t that we were happy with what we were doing. Now we are having to look at it.

The deficiencies of these systems - and of others similar to them - were cited as being:

- Inadequate training and preparation for leaving care work undertaken by locality social workers due to the pressure of other work;
- Limited liaison between locality workers and leaving care teams;
- Not all young people referred on/introduced to Leaving Care workers by locality social workers: some young people therefore unaware of the availability of the service;
- No automatic contact with young people leaving care, therefore the onus on young people to make the contact and not all prepared to do so;
- A lack of clear, agreed tasks and duties for Leaving Care Teams and therefore a lack of accountability.

Appendix 3.1 summarises the arrangements for leaving care services which were planned or in existence at the time of the Audit and Assessment. Four broad types of arrangement were identified:

- Leaving and after care services are contracted out to the voluntary sector;
- A ‘dual’ system approach;
- Teams specialising in looked after adolescents;
- Teams dealing with looked after adolescents plus other vulnerable young people, such as the young homeless.

Each of these is described in some more detail.

- **Arrangement with a voluntary sector organisation**

London is possibly unusual in that only one of the 33 boroughs had contracted out their leaving care and after-care services to a voluntary sector agency.

In this particular case, the arrangement with the voluntary agency, RPS Rainer, dates back to the mid eighties although it has, of course, undergone a number of changes in the intervening period. Here the clear policy was described as being that all young people, regardless of whether they will be going home, are referred to the specialist team at 16. This has the effect that some 40 new referrals are made per year and that at any one time the team is dealing with in excess of 200 young people. Once a young person is referred, he/she is seen alone by a member of the team and a multi-agency planning meeting is set up to draw up a leaving care plan. The team - named the Independent Living Scheme - began with one worker but it now comprises a team manager, more than 8 professionally qualified staff (not exclusively social workers)
plus administration and finance and finance support staff. It now also acts as gatekeeper to two types of semi-independent accommodation. A floating support service is also amongst the many services available. Representatives of the authority and the voluntary sector spoke of their satisfaction with this arrangement, stating that it facilitated a useful creativity.

In one other authority, a variation of this arrangement had just been agreed with a further voluntary organisation. Here there had been a longstanding arrangement with the voluntary agency to provide support in semi-independent accommodation. Now it was to be the case that they would carry out all after care support.

- **A dual system arrangement**

Approximately a third of London boroughs were operating or planning to move to this type of arrangement, which basically entails the young person being referred to the specialist leaving care team but with statutory responsibility for the case being retained by the locality social worker.

This was described as having the effect that leaving care specialists - who were not always social workers - could focus on preparation for leaving care and after care support by working alongside young people without the disadvantage of the 'authority' tag, seen to be associated with statutory responsibilities. The timing of this cross referral varied from borough to borough but was generally between the ages of 15 and 16; sometimes being linked in with actual dates of birth, but more commonly with first reviews after specific birthdays.

Two main advantages were cited in relation to this arrangement: it was more conducive to the development of a needs-led service; and that it was about working ‘alongside’ young people. Working in this way was seen not only as about working collaboratively with the young person but as an important transition in itself and an integral aspect of the young person’s preparation for independence. For this reason, too, many of the teams operating under this type of arrangement were located in premises well away from locality teams and had names which gave them an identity quite separate from services for looked after young people. These names included titles, which underlined independence such as Young Person’s Independence Service and Independence Plus Project.

There were also some difficulties reported with this arrangement, the main one being the cross-referral of cases by locality social workers at the appropriate time. Some of the measures taken to address this included investing funding in the specialist team, making the specialist team the gatekeeper to accommodation, and visiting locality teams in order to get the message across. A number of boroughs also mentioned that they had been greatly helped in this respect - or hoped to be so in the future - by virtue of improved management information systems which enabled them to identify those young people who ought to have been referred to them and, if they had not, then to follow up their referral.

One small borough was planning to change from this type of arrangement such that a locally based youth organisation - with a focus on education, training and
employment and the theme moving on - would provide many of the functions previously offered by an in-house specialist leaving care team.

• **A looked after adolescent team**

A similar proportion of boroughs, about one-third, had moved or were moving to an arrangement whereby a specialist team for looked after adolescents was set up. This was said to be in recognition of two factors. One of these was that professionals either thoroughly enjoyed the challenges of working with adolescents, or they did not: this system ensured that those operating the service chose to work with young people, and hence had a commitment to working with and for them. A second factor was that too much delay occurred in the cross-referral system, meaning that valuable preparation time was lost.

Once more, however, there had been difficulties in implementing such an arrangement. A major difficulty was that the arrangement involves the transfer of statutory responsibility. Many existing teams were small and comprised unqualified workers, often unwilling to assume statutory duties. In most instances of this arrangement, then, it was necessary to recruit new staff and such authorities were finding it necessary to adopt an incremental approach to this changeover.

As Appendix 3.1 shows, overall it was envisaged that these teams would work with young people from the age of 16 upwards. Two boroughs differed slightly in this respect. One dealt with young people from the age of 15 until such time as the young person moved into permanent accommodation when a separate outreach team came into operation; in the second case, all looked after children aged 11 plus were dealt with by one of two adolescent teams, and there was a separate after-care team to support young people who had left care.

In most instances this particular type of arrangement was still being implemented and it was, as yet, too early for most representatives to comment on its respective advantages and disadvantages. A concern in many, however, was how the combination of overall statutory care responsibilities and preparation for leaving care would work out in practice.

• **A team for vulnerable young people**

A relatively small proportion of London boroughs were operating this type of arrangement whereby a specialist team dealt with all vulnerable young people: those aged 15/16 and over who were looked after (or had been looked after in the past) and those with other difficulties including homelessness or potential homelessness problems.

Approximately half the authorities with this type of arrangement had been operating it for some time (and several now planned changing from it); others were in the process of moving to it. Opinions about its advantages and disadvantages varied accordingly. The main advantages were described as the potential it gave to offer a relatively seamless service to young people generally and was perceived as being less stigmatising by care leavers; the disadvantages were that it was expensive to resource
and that there could be clashes between meeting the needs of care leavers and those of other young people.

The issue of equity was raised by such teams, and by those who had worked in departments where some emphasis had been placed on offering a preventive service to young people. The overall impression conveyed was that preventive services had been geared to keeping young people out of care. It was reported, however, that all too often, the young people in receipt of preventive services subsequently re-presented as homeless young people and at that stage did not have access to the same rights as care leavers. This reflects the findings of a recent evaluation of an adolescent team in the north of England (Biehal and others, 2000). Teams designated to work with this wider group of vulnerable young people invariably expressed the view that the numbers of such young people tended to be very much under-estimated.

These changing arrangements reinforce the fact that there is no one blueprint for how leaving care services should be organised: much depends on the size, geography and a range of other factors pertaining to individual authorities. Clearly, however, the main emphases at the present time are:

- Ensuring that all care leavers are identified and have access to a service;
- Ensuring that care leavers are identified at a point in time whereby it is possible to provide them with some degree of preparation for leaving care;
- Ensuring appropriate after-care provision is available.

Clearly, too, it will take some time before it becomes apparent how well these different arrangements work. In this respect, it is an ideal time to commence an evaluation of the different models and of the outcomes for the young people concerned. There would likewise seem to be some merit in ensuring that any such evaluation did not focus exclusively on care leavers, but took account, too, of young people with similar difficulties although no direct experience of the care system.

Leaving care policies

Perhaps not surprisingly, given that so many London boroughs were in the process of changing their arrangements for delivering their leaving care services, most were also reviewing their leaving care policy and procedures. In the Audit and Assessment, authorities were asked to indicate whether they had a leaving care policy and if so to enclose it. Table 3.1 summarises the responses.

In addition, a third of authorities mentioned that policies were currently being reviewed and updated. Indeed, some authorities have subsequently sent copies of their new policies. These are in sharp contrast to the documents sent at the time of the questionnaire return which tended to focus on the law in relation to leaving care and to cover a few procedural matters
Table 3.1 Do authorities have a leaving care policy?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy enclosed</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy but not enclosed</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No policy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Departments were also asked to indicate whether their leaving care policy was a departmental policy only, or whether it was authority wide. Their responses are summarised in Table 3.2:

Table 3.2 Were leaving care policies departmental or authority-wide?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Departmental only</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority -wide</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable -no policy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, the vast majority of policies were departmental only. It was relatively rare for leaving care services to have ownership beyond the local SSD at the start of the *Audit and Assessment*. It was clear that by the end of the period of fieldwork this situation was beginning to change. One new leaving care policy document provided towards the end of the research was designed as an inter-agency document. This had appendices setting out departmental standards for preparing for independence and for support and care beyond 18, and was organised according to the following section headings:
Assessing readiness and preparation to leave care

The postal questionnaire to SSDs sought information on how young people’s readiness to leave care was assessed, and the involvement of other agencies in this process. Broadly speaking, most authorities responded that assessment was by means of the Assessment and Action Record in use at the time of statutory reviews. This having been said, several also commented in interview that use of the Assessment and Action record in that department was quite limited. In consequence, and as one social work manager put it:

_I’d have to say that at the minute assessment appears to be largely a matter of gut feeling._

In a few departments, attention was drawn to the existence of a checklist used to assess young people’s readiness to leave care. Frequently these were described as being rather inadequate and the expectation expressed that they would soon be reviewed. Some respondents pointed to the potential of the new assessment framework for improving practice in this respect. Only one department expressed satisfaction with the current means of assessing readiness to leave care. In this authority, a comprehensive proforma of skills had been developed by the specialist leaving care team. It had been in use and adapted over a number of years as needs changed. Parts of this are reproduced in Appendix 3.2.
Multi-agency assessment

Questionnaire responses indicated a very limited degree of multi-agency assessment. Overall this pattern was repeated in interviews. However, it was also apparent that some changes were occurring in this respect. For example, as is evident in the next section, when consideration is being given to placing a young person in some form of semi-independent accommodation managed by a housing association, representatives of the housing association undertake an assessment of the young person’s needs, and indeed frequently reserve the right to accept or reject the referral on the basis of that assessment. Likewise there is an increasing involvement of careers and training specialists.

With the involvement of specialist providers set to continue to increase in the future, it can be anticipated that multi-agency assessment will correspondingly increase. There is considerable potential in this respect for the development of a much more needs-based form of service delivery to care leavers. At the same time, however, it may be appropriate to devote attention to ensuring that the timing of assessments is appropriate and that assessments are not duplicated by virtue of a range of agencies and professionals working unilaterally.

The involvement of fieldworkers, residential staff and foster carers

As numerous research studies and good practice guides have pointed out leaving care is not a single event, but more of a process. The individuals and staff with whom young people are placed prior to moving to independence or semi-independence have a pivotal role in both assessing their readiness to leave care and preparing them for this. Likewise their supervising social workers have a major contribution to make. The questionnaire sought information on any policies or training available to field workers, residential care staff and foster carers in this respect.

Table 3.3 Satisfaction with the involvement of fieldworkers, residential staff and foster carers in preparing young people to leave care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fieldworkers</th>
<th>Residential</th>
<th>Foster Carers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite satisfied</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite dissatisfied</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Most young people said to be placed in foster care
This picture that emerged shows that little attention had been devoted to preparing those who themselves were expected to prepare young people to leave care. Less than 15 per cent of boroughs reported the availability of training on leaving care for either fieldworkers or residential staff. The situation where foster carers were concerned was slightly better: just under a third of boroughs reported the current availability of training for foster carers, and slightly over a third reported planning this for the future. The satisfaction of boroughs with the level of involvement of field workers, residential staff and foster carers in preparing young people to leave care is summarised in Table 3.3. This shows clear need for more attention to be devoted to this issue.

**Particularly vulnerable groups**

The previous section showed that many London boroughs have incomplete information about the numbers of young people in certain groups identified by research as having particular needs: young asylum seekers, those with disabilities, those from black and minority ethnic groups, and young pregnant women or parents. The questionnaire asked respondents how satisfied they were with the service currently available to these groups. Table 3.4 summarises the responses.

As can be seen, most satisfaction was expressed about the services available for those from black and minority ethnic groups. The situation vis a vis other groups was rather more mixed. Although, for example, almost two thirds were relatively satisfied with services for young parents/pregnant young women, a third described themselves as being dissatisfied to some degree with the service available. The situation with regard to those with disabilities was more complex. Although a fairly high degree of dissatisfaction with services was reported, it was equally pointed out that services to this group of young people was typically dealt with by another specialist team.

More problematic to leaving care services, were young people with moderate learning difficulties: they invariably needed a longer period of preparation for independence, and adult services were slow to accept any responsibility for them. The position with young asylum seekers was more mixed: attention being drawn to the additional demands being placed on authorities by this group over recent years.
Table 3.4 SSD Satisfaction with services for particular groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Asylum Seekers</th>
<th>MEGs</th>
<th>Pregnant / Parents</th>
<th>With Dissabilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite satisfied</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite dissatisfied</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, however, it was not these groups of young people which departments saw as being the most vulnerable: these young people tended to access leaving care services. More problematic were those who tended not to want to access services, and those whose behaviour when they did so created difficulty over accommodation. These were identified as those who had been involved in offending, those involved with drugs and with mental health problems.

A number of authorities also mentioned their concern about young people placed out of the authority: distance meant that they had more limited access and that social workers were less likely to visit. As a result, these young people - often cited as being more likely to be in foster care - tended to be reliant on foster carers for their preparation for leaving care and, as indicated above, satisfaction with foster carers’ involvement in this aspect of service provision was not always high.

**Personalised leaving care plan**

The whole objective in assessing individual care leavers’ needs is to enable the preparation of a personalised leaving care plan. The 33 London boroughs were therefore asked to estimate the proportion of young people leaving the care of their department who had such a plan. Table 3.5 summarises the responses.

In interview, a number of respondents acknowledged that these figures perhaps needed to be revised because it was likely that they referred to the percentage of young people in touch with the leaving care team who had a personalised leaving care plan. Such a revision underlines the impression given by a number of authorities that leaving care teams are currently dealing with only a percentage of care leavers, and that some are receiving virtually no service at all.
Table 3.5 Percentage of care leavers cited as having a personalised leaving care plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 75 &amp; 100%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 50 &amp; 75%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximately half</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 25 &amp; 50%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 25%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>33</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Monitoring progress and outcomes

The previous section served to highlight that young people have strong feelings about the need for social workers to maintain contact with them. Indeed they made quite clear their view that a social worker should always be available to them, but also that social workers should make a habit of contacting them at regular intervals, rather than always waiting on the young person to make the contact. The proposed new legislation takes account of this and the Audit and Assessment sought to assess the progress being made in preparation for this.

Overall most authorities acknowledged that a lot of work remained to be done in this respect, typical comments being:

*Each care leaver is assigned an after care worker who is responsible for maintaining contact. Level of contact has not been routinely monitored in the past but management information systems are being developed to address this.*

*No formal arrangements at present. Future plans include ‘drop-in facility' and timetabled contact in agreement with young person.*

*Most young people remain allocated to a named social worker until they are 19 at least. Duty/drop-in available to all care leavers until they are 19 at least.*

*Through regular contacts on allocated cases and all young people will receive a letter every six months reminding them of service entitlement, encouraging them to contact us with news of their progress.*

*(This is still) in formation stage.*
In addition, a number of respondents drew attention to the fact that as new management information systems began to operate their attention had been drawn to not insignificant numbers of care leavers of whom they had previously been unaware: in teams set up to provide after care support, this was already giving rise to problems. As one respondent put it:

*We thought we had it cracked: we had worked out likely numbers and planned the team accordingly. Then over the past couple of weeks another 30 plus cases have popped up and the team is just going to have to absorb them. But that’s a lot of cases for four workers to absorb. I only hope there are no more surprises of that type.*

**Information for care leavers**

Departments were also asked to estimate the number of care leavers in their department who were provided with:

(a) A written guide to available sources of information and support;

(b) An identified person who can offer /coordinate support after they have left care.

Their responses are summarised in Tables 3.6 and 3.7. As was the case with personalised leaving care plans, these figures may be more positive than the reality. Most respondents later commented in interview that they had replied in terms of those young people with whom the specialist leaving care team was in contact.

**Table 3.6 Percentage of care leavers provided with a written guide**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 75 &amp; 100%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 50 &amp; 75%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximately half</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 25 &amp; 50%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 25%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>33</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These responses - particularly in light of their likely over-estimation - do not present a very optimistic picture. However, the possibility that half the London boroughs provide less than 50 percent of the care leavers with a written guide on sources of information and support, and that a similar proportion do not provide all care leavers with a named contact, suggests a clear agenda for action for managers of the new teams. Appendix 3.3 contains copies of the documentation provided by one
department in this respect. This might provide authorities who have not so far taken such steps with some useful insights into how to address these issues.

Table 3.7 Percentage of care leavers with named after-care support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 75 &amp; 100%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 50 &amp; 75%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximately half</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 25 &amp; 50%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 25%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concluding remarks

This section has examined how the 33 London boroughs organise their leaving care services and their preparations to meet the requirements of the proposed new legislation. It has also looked at how the needs of young people about to leave care are assessed and, in broad terms, at how departments set about their responsibilities to prepare young people to leave care and provide them with after care support.

A number of interlinking messages emerge.

- Overall, the majority of London boroughs acknowledge that they have a considerable amount of work to do to achieve the standards being set by the proposed legislation.

- In order to meet these new standards many are involved in a reorganisation of leaving and after care services and in the introduction of new and more comprehensive management information systems, assisted through funding made available through Quality Protects. There have, however, been difficulties in both these respects. In relation to reorganisation, it has not always been possible to recruit staff, especially team managers, so with the transfer of statutory responsibilities an incremental approach to change has been necessary.

- Likewise operational difficulties have been encountered with new management information systems, and although these new systems have for the most part begun to yield useful information, their potential has rarely been realised so far.
• Much work remains to be done by many departments in terms of providing a basic infrastructure of leaving care services: having the necessary tools for assessing needs; ensuring that all relevant parties have an input to assessment; establishing a framework for preparation and after-care support; and collating information in the form of guides or lists of the personnel that are available to young people.

• There are also issues in relation to hard to reach young people: those involved with drugs, who offend and who have mental health problems. Some authorities are seeking to address this by the employment of other than social workers, and in particular by the engagement of those with a Youth Service background. This is likely to be a useful development but if not accompanied by the formation of improved links with, for example, the new YOTs, health service, schools and LEAs, is likely to be restricted in impact.

• Leaving care teams - in whatever organisational form and however they are named - undoubtedly have the potential to smooth young people’s transition from care to independence. One cannot, however, overlook the fact that young people’s readiness to leave care is determined by many experiences, including their experience in care itself: the stability, continuity and consistency it has offered across all dimensions of their lives. Reorganised teams with a focus on looked after young people (as opposed to children) would appear to have much to offer in this respect. Nonetheless it would appear foolhardy not to pay greater attention to the role of fieldworkers, residential staff and foster carers by, for example, providing better training opportunities in relation to leaving care.

Finally, an attempt has been made within this section to provide exemplars of practice which might assist departments who have yet to address certain areas. Yet a huge amount remains to be learned about the effectiveness of different service models and how they can best be nonetheless delivered to provide appropriate outcomes. The BEACON COUNCIL scheme has a role to play in this. Nonetheless, as departments stand poised to enter a new era of leaving care services, it would seem timely to embark on research on the topic, something that was beyond the scope of the current Audit & Assessment.
### Appendix 3.1: SSD arrangements for Leaving and After Care Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Specialist team with voluntary sector</th>
<th>Dual system</th>
<th>Looked after adolescent team (a)</th>
<th>(a) plus other vulnerable yp including homeless</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being set up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Moving to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Moving to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Moving to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
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Appendix 3.2

Wandsworth Independent Living Scheme - Assessment and Preparation Document

The Children Act and the Department's Section 24 policy and procedures place emphasis on the need to begin the process of preparation during a young person's teenage years and by the time the young person is 16 at the latest. While many of our young people will struggle in their transition to adult life it is essential that opportunities for young people to practice, fail, learn and achieve is not missed.

The purpose of this document is to establish and clarify the criteria used by staff to assess young people in transition from being looked after by the Council. It is an attempt to set out the specific skills which young people are expected to have in order for them to move as smoothly and positively from a placement to independent living and to maximise their chances of this being a successful transition.

Young people develop and mature at different rates and may be very competent in some skill areas while being inexperienced in others. Young people are not expected to be fully competent in all areas; some skills can only be gained by experience. So skills 1 to 6 constitute the necessary skills which young people will need to achieve during their adolescent years and particularly in the years between 16 and 18. Skill areas 7 to 11 are additional skill areas to be addressed during preparation.

Inevitably, some of the skill areas overlap are mutually interdependent and there will be creative approaches to helping young people to become confident in their life skills which are not described here. No list of the necessary skills required for successful independence will be exhaustive. This document will be reviewed and contributions from young people and adults involved in this task are welcome.

Each of the skill areas are defined, and an explanation of how young people can show they have particular skills is offered together with preparation tasks and ideas. It is hoped that this is in language which is understandable to all!

1. Using support networks

1. Definition
The ability to understand and use support from others.
Ability to identify the need for peers/adults you can/will provide support.

2. Demonstration
Ability to maintain/sustain contacts with important individuals, groups, agencies.
Ability to make and keep appointments with relevant agencies.
Ability to talk to others about things that are bothering you.
Ability to use advice from your social network or professionals who are working with you.
Ability to recognise relationships which may not be in your best interests.

3. Tasks
Find out where local advice agencies are and what they do.
Find out about local facilities – leisure, sports, libraries, open spaces.
Communicate worries and anxieties to people around you.
Explore and develop interests and hobbies which put you in contact with other people.
Talk to people about personal issues, not necessarily problems.
Keep in touch with your extended family and past social networks if appropriate.
Develop positive relationships with your peers.
Make use of support if and when offered.

2. Taking care of yourself

1. Definition
Ability to understand and act on the need to look after oneself, including ability to recognise illness and seek appropriate treatment.
Ability to recognise and avoid danger to physical and emotional well being.

2. Demonstration
Ability to plan, shop for and cook nutritious food.
Ability to organise sufficient sleep at times which do not interfere with other requirements.
Ability to register with GP, dentist, hospital, STD clinic, antenatal clinics, etc.
Ability to seek advice about sexual health and contraception.
Ability to identify depression.
Ability to identify loneliness.
Ability to seek help/treatment when required.
Ability to understand the dangers of alcohol, drug or substance misuse.
Ability to understand the value of physical exercise.
Knowledge of precautions required to avoid infection by HIV.

3. Preparation tasks
Sign on with GP, dentist, other medical services.
Make appointments as necessary.
Keep appointments as necessary.
Plan, shop for and cook as week's nutritious meals within a realistic budget.
Maintain a regular sleep pattern.
Know about counseling and mental health services.
Know when and from where to seek support, when ill, depressed, or lonely.
Know about services for alcohol, drug and substance misuse.

3. Managing money

1. Definition
The ability to live realistically on your current income level.
The ability to plan finances in line with financial responsibilities.

2. Demonstration
Ability to establish a regular income.
Ability to plan and organise finances to meet expenditure.
Ability to prioritise spending.
Ability to recognise financial responsibilities.
Abilities to recognise the consequences of non-payment.
Ability to recognise when you are in financial difficulty and now and when to ask for help.
Ability to save towards something you cannot buy straight away.
Ability to negotiate and stick to financial agreements.
Ability to make shopping lists and stick to them.

3. Preparation tasks
Organise an income either through work, signing on for benefit, or receiving pocket money, or claiming appropriate education grants, etc.
Organise Housing Benefit if applicable.
Open and operate a savings account in which to save an excess income, eg pocket money.
Shop for a meal on a tight budget.
Visit gas and electric showrooms to gather information about methods of payment.
Make a regular contribution to housekeeping.
Find out where to go for help, ie which people or agencies talk to if you are in debt.
Shop for your own clothes and personal items.
Draw up a budget plan with your carer or Independent Living Scheme worker.
Shop around when buying larger or more expensive items.

4. Knowledge and ability to carry out practical tasks

1. Definition
The ability to carry out practical tasks so as to live in independent accommodation without endangering physical wellbeing.

2. Demonstrations
Ability to cook a meal including shopping and preparation.
Ability to fill in a form.
Ability to show basic sewing skills.
Ability to use launderette and do own washing.
Ability to keep personal space clean.
Ability to carry out basic DIY skills.
Ability to deal with emergency in the home.
Ability to use public phone.
Ability to have some knowledge of public transport system.
Ability to observe problems (eg leaking pipe) and to know when DIY or professional help is required.

3. Preparation tasks
Shop and prepare a meal, ie plan a menu, cook meal, shop for meal.
Shop for foods in a variety of outlets, ie supermarket, local shop, market.
Develop cooking skills with particular emphasis on own cultural needs and/or obtain basic cookery book.
Attempt filling in form with help if necessary.
Practice basic sewing skills, ie sewing on button on shirt, hemming trousers, etc.
Use the launderette at least once during the assessment period with assistance if necessary.
Learn how to do laundry, ie sorting of clothes, use of fabric conditioners and types of washing powders and ironing own clothes.
Keep own personal space at a level which does not constitute a health risk.

Know how to:
a) use a Hoover and how to change Hoover bags
b) polish and clean furniture with appropriate cleaners
c) clean baths and toilet
d) wash dishes and pans and clean the cooker
e) clean and defrost a fridge
f) participate in any household chores

Find out how to:
a) put on a plug
b) understand the correct fuse to be used for appliances
c) use basic common sense in dealing with problems around the home, ie reading instructions for appliances, trying to unblock sinks, have items repaired by a professional rather than discarded
d) learn decorating techniques and have practice
e) find out about emergency telephone numbers, ie housing, police, water, gas, hospital
f) obtain a National Insurance number and a National Health card
g) practice using a public phone box, including both coin and card operated phones.
h) obtain underground map and bus map and gain knowledge of local routes and a sense of current fares
i) use alternative methods of travel to work or college and be supported in exploring new areas and plan journeys, especially out of London
j) obtain copy of the Guide for Children in Care
k) complete Independent Living Scheme Questionnaire.

5. Resolving conflict

1. Definition
Ability to live peacefully with yourself and others.

2. Demonstration
Ability to disagree with others without losing control.
Ability to compromise.
Ability to give in or lose an argument without feeling you have lost face.
Ability to win without feeling guilty or making the other person feel bad.
Ability to see the other person's point of view.

3. Preparation tasks
Draw up an agreement which shows a compromise has been made by the young person, eg time to be in at night, level of music noise, frequency of cleaning room, staying out at night with friends.
Stick to an agreement made which involved compromise.
Attend meetings and disagree if necessary without walking out of the room!
Be angry if you are justified without being aggressive.
Stand your ground if you are being unfairly treated without becoming aggressive.

6. Career planning

1. Definition
Understanding of the meaning of planning a career, involving short, medium and long term aims.

2. Demonstration
Ability to seek information about careers from relevant adults, specialists and agencies.
Ability to discuss the different options available, eg further or higher education, training, work, living on benefit.
Ability to talk about short, medium and long term aims.
Ability to understand the implications of the selection of a particular option.
Ability to be realistic about goals.

3. Preparation tasks
Make appointments with relevant advisers, eg careers officer, careers teacher, college adviser, Independent Living Scheme employment worker to obtain information about careers.
Discuss information with others.
Talk about options, advantages and disadvantages, possibilities and realities involving adults who have knowledge or power to bring to the discussion.
Seek help with getting further advice or information if necessary.
Make a plan of action either alone or with others.
Keep appointments as necessary to follow a career plan and make sure this is secure.
Find out the costs of following a career plan.
Find out what financial support is needed to follow a career plan and make sure this is secure.
Talk about the financial implications of living independently while pursuing a career plan.
Talk about financial implications of living independently and not pursuing a career plan.

7. Setting behaviour boundaries

1. Definition
Ability to recognise in oneself and others the limits or boundaries beyond which other people are not expected to go uninvited (e.g., noise levels, racial abuse, verbal abuse).

2. Demonstration
Ability to show respect for your own and others' needs and freedoms.
Ability to show sensitivity to other people by keeping to agreements, observing time limits, etc.
Ability to recognise your own and others' moods and be sensitive to this.
Knowledge of your right and others' rights to say 'No'.
Ability to respect your own and others' privacy.
Ability to recognise and accept difference – culture, lifestyle, religion, sex.

3. Preparation tasks.
Talk about experiences when you felt invaded or felt you had invaded others – how did it feel? What could be different?
Talk about situations of conflict, when you were criticised, when you suffered injustice – how was this dealt with? How could it have been dealt with better/differently?
Describe a situation where things got out of hand or were frightening or dangerous – how did this arise? How was this dealt with? How could it have been dealt with better/differently?
Confront situations where you were not sensitive. Ask the other person how they felt. Notice if you do it better next time.
Confront situations where other people are not sensitive to you/hurt your feelings.

8. Making choices

1. Definition
Ability to show that choices can be made by considering the advantages and disadvantages and choosing an option that is (a) most likely to benefit yourself, and (b) not going to have harmful consequences for others.

2. Demonstration
Ability to get the information you need to be able to consider how many options you have and the advantages and disadvantages of the different options.
Ability to use other people to help think through the options.
Ability to think forward to guess the consequences of the different options.

3. Preparation tasks
Use experience of making choices to express thought processes involved.
Describe a good choice you made.
Describe a bad choice you made.
Use an adult you know to talk through a choice you have to make.
Evaluate your choice taking into account whether you got the right information, you knew about all the different options, you thought about the advantages and disadvantages of the options, whether your choice was the best for you, whether your choice affected others.
Explore the implications of offending.
Explore the implications of becoming a parent.
9. Understanding yourself and your history

1. **Definition**
   Knowledge of personal and family history, cultural identity and how these influence ideas, attitudes and behaviour. Having insight into personal strengths and weaknesses.

2. **Demonstration**
   - Ability to acknowledge that events in personal history shape up.
   - Ability to find out about your history.
   - Ability to find out about your family's history.
   - Ability to talk about your cultural background (this could be race, ethnicity, class, religion, etc).
   - Ability to understand the reasons for being looked after by the Council.
   - Ability to understand the way in which your personality has been influenced by your history and significant events.
   - Awareness of yourself as an individual with relationships with others and belonging to wider social groups.
   - Awareness of your own sexuality and sexual orientation.

3. **Preparation tasks**
   - Find out which people know about your history.
   - Find out about your history from them.
   - Find out about your cultural group – especially if you have been separated from it.
   - Find out about the reasons for being looked after by the Council (may involve seeing records).
   - Talk about the significant people in your life.

10. Citizenship

1. **Definition**
   - Ability to understand one's social and political rights and responsibilities.
   - Ability to understand how local and national government functions and how it can be influenced.
   - Ability to understand how communities are constituted and the role of the individual in them.

2. **Demonstration**
   - Ability to talk about local, national and international issues of significance to oneself and others.
   - Ability to talk about local and central government policies which affect young people.
   - Knowledge of civil rights.
   - Knowledge of legal rights.
   - Knowledge of complaints procedures and Citizen's Charter.

3. **Preparation**
   - Find out how to register to vote.
   - Find out when local elections are held.
   - Find out who the ward councillor and MP are.
   - Find out about the political views of the newspaper most regularly seen.
   - Find out about local facilities – leisure, sports, libraries, open spaces.
   - Find out about local history.
   - Find out about ways in which people can help others in their neighbourhood – eg elderly neighbours, as a volunteer, etc.
   - Find out about complaints procedures – eg local authority, London Electricity, British Telecom.
Find out about local pressure groups, eg Friends of the Earth.

11. Solving problems

1. Definition
Being able to deal with problems in a systematic, rational way so that they get sorted out as quickly and effectively as possible.

2. Demonstrations
Knowing and admitting when something is a problem, early enough to sort it out and not hoping it will go away if ignored.
Being able to get the information and advice needed to be clear what is causing the problem and what courses of action are available to sort it out.
Being able to describe how a chosen course of action will solve the problem.
Being able to identify and use the support, help and resources needed to solve the problem.
Being able to carry through a chosen course of action to the end, or to recognise when it is not working and decide on an alternative strategy.
Knowing when the problem has been solved and being able to describe why the problem no longer exists.
Being able to accept that sometimes even the best solution can still involve a loss.

3. Preparation tasks
Think through and express thoughts on problems, causes, possible solutions.
Play games which encourage strategic thinking – eg cards, draughts, chess, etc.
4. Accommodation

The government’s current proposals for care leaving services recognise that many looked after young people are expected to manage living on their own, not only from a very young age but at a much earlier age than young people generally (DoH 1999a). This has clear implications for the accommodation which young people require as they prepare to make their way to independence. Before considering how London boroughs are responding to this challenge, this section begins by examining what the literature says about the accommodation needs of young people leaving care. In doing so, it draws on reports with a specific focus on care leavers but also on those which are concerned with the wider issue of youth homelessness.

Studies have used a variety of definitions of youth homelessness but this is usually taken to represent a range of different forms of housing situations. This includes people sleeping rough, homeless people accepted for rehousing by local authorities under their statutory duties and the hidden homeless, typically staying temporarily with friends or relatives.

Previous research

Most young people tend to ‘leave’ home on a number of occasions, but that they may be well into their 20's when they last leave home (Jones 1995). In contrast, numerous research studies point to the fact that many looked after young people have been expected to be ‘independent’ at 16 or 17 years. In their sample, Biehal et al (1995), for instance, found that 29 per cent of care leavers moved to independence at the age of 16 and 60 per cent before the age of 18, findings which are consistent with several other research studies (Stein and Carey 1986; Garnett 1992).

In the study by Biehal and colleagues (1995), the most substantial to have been undertaken of care leavers in the UK, 15 per cent of their survey sample had experienced homelessness within nine months of leaving care and over a fifth of the interview sample were homeless at some point within two years of leaving care, some of them on several occasions.

The tendency for those with a background in care to be over-represented amongst the young homeless also emerges from several studies of youth homelessness. For example, reports by the Young Homelessness Group (1991), NCH (1993), Jones (1995), Smith et al (1996) have found that between a fifth and a third of the young homeless have been in care at some point in their lives. Likewise Craig et al (1996) who compared homeless and non-homeless young people found that those who were homeless were ten times more likely to have spent some time in statutory care during childhood. Evidence from Centrepoint lends further weight to these findings, a series of reports showing that around a third of the young people using their services had a care background (Randall, 1989; Strathdee, 1992; McCluskey 1994; Strathdee and Johnson, 1994). A later report (Nassor, 1996) suggests that this figure may even be as high as 40 per cent in London.
A number of studies also show that care leavers may be at particular risk of sleeping rough (Anderson et al., 1993; Strathdee and Johnson, 1994, and Markey, 1998). In the study by Biehal and colleagues (1995), two thirds of those in the interview sample who had become homeless had slept rough or stayed in hostels for the homeless. In Kirby’s later study of homeless care leavers (1994), the vast majority had slept rough and had used emergency hostels.

**Policy Context**

This is the background against which the government launched its Quality Protects Initiative which, amongst other things, encouraged local authorities to examine and review its services to care leavers. The Management Action Plans now required of local authorities under this initiative therefore seek evidence of activity to date and future plans for increasing the support provided for care leavers, including steps to prevent inappropriate discharge at 16 and 17. They also seek information on current and planned services for supporting care leavers up to the age of 21 along a range of dimensions, the first of these being in relation to housing. Access to the MAPs of all London boroughs was enabled as part of this project: analysis of these shows that almost all boroughs make reference to accommodation. Overall, however, the MAPs convey a limited impression of the range of activity and the issues arising in relation to this particular topic.

In the remainder of this section, the research data relevant to the subject of accommodation obtained is discussed under the following main headings:

- The age at which young people leave care;
- Transitional accommodation arrangements;
- Arrangements for independent accommodation;
- Young people’s views and experiences.

The section draws on questionnaires completed by and interviews with SSD personnel; interviews with personnel in the housing and voluntary child care sectors, and with young people themselves. The findings are illuminated by four case studies of care leavers; Jane, Sam, Tom and two unaccompanied refugee children. These case studies were provided by London Connection, a voluntary agency providing information, advice and advocacy to young single homeless people in London. The young people in the case studies had all been in the care of London boroughs.
The age at which young people leave care

The questionnaire asked SSDs about three particular areas relevant to this topic:

- Whether or not the department had a written policy on the age at which young people were discharged from care;

- The numbers of young people discharged from care in the year 1998-1999 (the last complete year at the time the *Audit and Assessment* was undertaken) at age 15 years, 16 years, 17 years and 18 years;

- Any information contained in the QP MAP2 on steps the department was taking to prevent the inappropriate discharge from care of 16 and 17 year olds.

Policy on the age of leaving care

On the questionnaire, only five authorities reported having a written policy on the age at which young people leave care, and in most of these instances we were referred to leaving care policy and procedure documents which highlighted that young people’s departure from care need not correspond with any particular chronological age.

Interviews tended to cast more light on this subject. Respondents in most authorities acknowledged that it had not been uncommon practice for young people to cease to be accommodated at 16 or 17 years. In this respect our attention was drawn to the pressure on departments’ placement budgets, and in particular their reliance on placements in the private and voluntary sector for many adolescents.

A picture emerged of young people not necessarily being told to leave care, but of young people anxious to be rid of SSD involvement, sometimes absconding to avoid it, of social workers finding them ‘uncooperative’ clients, and SSDs content to turn a blind eye and reduce costs. Such young people were said to be those who had often entered the care system late in their childhood, had problematic behaviour, and whom SSDs had had difficulty in placing within care.

Presumably, too, some must have continued to have had some degree of family involvement, although to what degree, and for how long, this could be relied on must remain uncertain. Not all young people did have such contact, and in the course of interviews, it was not uncommon for respondents to describe cases they were now having to deal with under after care provisions.

The case studies of Jane, Tom and Sam presented in this section highlight the possible consequences for such youngsters of inappropriate early discharge from the care support of social services.

In the course of interviews with representatives of the voluntary sector and of housing associations, attention was drawn to specific instances of deliberate decisions being made to cease accommodating young people. Invariably these were young people with complex multiple problems of a mental health nature, some of whom were
described as having been in receipt of a specialist service. It appeared to be the case that if these young people were not conspicuously responding well to the intervention, they were at risk of having to live independently as they approached their eighteenth birthday. Overall these representatives reported that fewer young people were being discharged from care at 16 years, but that discharge at 17 years was far from being uncommon.

These same respondents also drew attention to the fact that whilst not all the young people they dealt with had been looked after, very few had not had some dealings with SSDs in the course of their childhood. In this respect, they often highlighted the very similar characteristics of many of their users in terms of disrupted childhood experiences, some being looked after as adolescents, others not. As one respondent put it:

*There’s often very little difference between those who have been looked after and those that have not. Some end up in care; others have just had contact with SSDs over a number of years. At the end of the day what it means is that some have an entitlement to a service which they may not be getting, while others don’t even have that entitlement.*

One explanation given for this was the development over recent years of the policy of preventing admission to care and supporting children and families in the community. The findings of recent research by Biehal and Clayden (2000) tend to lend support to this view.

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**Jane: rough sleeping at 15 years**

**Background**
- At an early age on the At Risk Register of a London borough because of abuse within the family.
- Truancy and inappropriate sexual behaviour followed Jane’s rape by an adult and led to breakdown in her relationship with mother (who had been abused herself) and SSD involvement.
- Admitted to care and placed with foster carers within the same area: very unhappy as rumours circulating about the rape and her behaviour.
- Absconded and arrived in the West End, age 15.

**West End Experience**
- After sleeping rough for a few days she made contact with London Connection, a voluntary organisation which provides advice and assistance and a day centre for young single homeless people. London Connection arranged a placement for Jane in a NSPCC refuge.
- She spent two nights there before running away again.
- Concern about her drug abuse, promiscuity and possible involvement in prostitution.
- Assaulted on the streets and sought further assistance from London Connection, who noted a dramatic deterioration in her overall condition.
- Placed again in NSPCC refuge and again absconded.
- Case conference organised by London Connection. Present: London Connection, NSPCC worker, social worker, social services manager, two West End Police Officers, mother.
- Jane invited but declined to attend: expressed the view that she did not wish to return
Jane decided to live with her aunt, and was escorted there by the police. She has not subsequently been seen in the West End.

**Sam: Current age 20 years**

**Background**
- Sam first became looked after by a London borough when he was aged 8 years and remained in care throughout his childhood. His first placement was in a local children’s home but he was soon moved to a therapeutic community in Kent on account of his behaviour. He remained there for six years and has fond memories of his experience there.
- At 14, he was moved to foster carers. Although Sam was not a practising Catholic, Social Services had advertised for a Catholic family to look after him. Sam considers his foster parents were elderly and religious. Sam started smoking, playing music loudly and staying out. Although he remained there for three years, he spent a lot of time staying with friends and sleeping rough. At 17, his foster carers evicted him.
- When Sam approached Social Services, he was told he had burnt his bridges.
- He then spent a year travelling around all over England, often sleeping rough. At one stage, he ended up in Kent and he slept rough outside the gates of the therapeutic community where he had once been placed. He said he felt safe there.
- The therapeutic community contacted Sam’s SS Department and advocated on his behalf.
- They eventually accepted responsibility for Sam and placed him in a housing association flat with floating support. He maintains he was visited twice in six months, had no support plan and received no advice on budgeting etc. After six months, he was evicted because of rent arrears.
- When he approached his SSD, he was refused any further assistance.
- He slept rough for three weeks.

**Current situation**
He has now made contact with an organisation helping young single homeless people. They have arranged a place for him in a hostel and are negotiating with the SSD on his behalf over future plans and support not previously provided.

**Numbers of young people leaving care at 15,16,17 and 18 years of age**

We asked individual authorities to supply us with a detailed break down of the ages at which young people over the age of 15 leave care. Not all departments completed this section, and one must assume that they were unable to provide this data. For those which did, some confusion may have existed over whether the information sought referred to young people who had legally left care, or simply to those who had moved on to some form of semi- or independent living arrangement or elsewhere. Several also replied with statements such as: The majority of young people stay until 18 years.
Table 4.1 below summarises the responses provided by those which did reply with figures in more than one of the designated categories (14 authorities).

Table 4.1 : Young people discharged from care at 15, 16, 17 and 18 years

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authority</th>
<th>15</th>
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This table is difficult to interpret not least because authorities have different sizes of looked after children populations, and may also have interpreted the question differently. Individual figures may also be somewhat spurious, there being a strong likelihood that several guesstimates were given.

What this table suggests is a considerable diversity of practice amongst these London boroughs, with some departments discharging as many as 25 per cent of young people at 15 years, and the majority discharging upwards of a third at 16/17 years. It is almost irrelevant whether respondents replied in terms of legal discharge or a move to semi-independent accommodation, as the figures generally lead one to question the baseline to which SSDs may be working.

When figures on this topic provided to us were compared to those available in MAPs, inconsistencies were evident. It was also noted that a few authorities forecast a higher percentage of discharges at 16 in the future, than those currently reported to be occurring at the time. One possible - though perhaps unlikely - reason for this may be that account was being taken of the recent influx of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people from Eastern Europe.

Cumulatively, these features suggest that SSDs have some way to go before being able to provide consistent, reliable data on this quite fundamental aspect of care services.
Tom: Current age 19 years

Background history

- Although Tom was born in a London borough, his family moved to Ireland. When his parents broke up, his mother was awarded custody of Tom but he was kidnapped by his father who brought him back to England. Both Tom and his father were picked up by the police on arrival.
- Tom, by then aged 12, was first placed in a children’s home for four months, and then with an aunt for a further six months. At this stage, Social Services having assessed his father’s situation, Tom returned to his father.
- At 15 years, he was taken back into care because father was using and dealing in drugs and Tom had become involved in these activities. In order to address his drug-induced psychosis, he was placed by the London borough in a specialist Centrepoint hostel and then moved to a rehabilitation hospital for three months.
- On discharge from there, and by then aged 16, Tom was placed in supportive lodgings and then in a therapeutic community until he was 17 years.
- In Tom’s own words, he then >lost it< and went back to Ireland for a year. He cannot explain why he did this and recalls little of what happened while he was there.
- At 18, he returned to London and made contact with Social Services who refused to support him.

Recent experience

After sleeping rough for three months, he made contact with London Connection. London Connection are currently negotiating with the borough who continue to have responsibilities for Tom and have organised a legal advocate for him through the Voice of the Child in Care.

Steps being taken to prevent the inappropriate discharge from care of 16 and 17 year olds

As has already been mentioned, this was a heading within the MAPs. It was also a question asked of SSDs in the postal questionnaires. Most authorities therefore referred us to their MAPs. The MAPs refer to a wide range of developments and measures, accommodation being just one of a number of possibilities. Indeed, as has been mentioned in an earlier section, the emphasis of most MAPs was more on the reorganisation of the pattern of service delivery.

Transitional accommodation arrangements

Quilgars and Pleafce (1999) have documented the rapid expansion in the development of transitional accommodation for homeless young people in the nineties. Broad (1998), writing with a focus on care leavers, similarly reports on this expansion particularly over the period 1994-96. However, Broad also notes that while leaving care services reported housing as their highest category of housing achievement in this period, housing was also listed as their second highest problem category. Similar findings were evident in this project with a huge amount of development being noted in relation to accommodation, but often in a somewhat ad hoc manner and based on little real evidence of what works for what young people and at what point in time.
Two brothers aged 16 and 17: previous asylum seekers

Background
- After a year, they were given two weeks’ notice to leave the children’s home, and provided with a list of hostel contacts, drug information centres etc.
- Their benefits did not come through on time. B&Bs would not take them because of their age and benefit regulations made it difficult for them to remain together.
- They slept rough for two nights and then sought help from a voluntary agency, who advocated with the SSD on their behalf.

Current situation
They are now being accommodated together by Social Services

The matter of transitional accommodation for young people as they move towards independence has implications for planning at both the strategic and the individual level. Writing in relation to the former, Biehal and Wade (1999) draw on a range of evidence to highlight that care leavers are not a homogenous group and to provide the following pointers:

- Good transitions should not occur too early;
- Transitions should be well planned and well supported;
- A range of accommodation options needs to be available in order to meet different
- Differing levels of need;
- A flexible, needs-led approach which allows young people to return to more supported accommodation when necessary;
- Support on offer until young people no longer need it or develop an alternative network of support.

Writing more from the perspective of individual personal planning, Hutson (1995, 1997) suggests the following as assisting positive outcomes:

- Involving young people in planning and decision-making;
- Assessing needs and preparing young people;
- Offering a choice in the type and location of accommodation;
- Not moving young people in an unplanned way, before they are ready;
- Having a contingency plan in case the proposed accommodation breaks down;
- Setting up a package of support to go with the accommodation;
- Having a clear financial plan for the accommodation;
- Providing information relevant to the type of accommodation.

Clearly to meet these needs at an individual level, work needs to be undertaken at the strategic level and it was on this aspect that this project focused. In what follows, data from questionnaires, MAPs and interviews with a range of personnel - in SSDs, housing associations and the voluntary sector - are presented to outline how London boroughs are approaching the question of strategy, the perceived gaps, the types of
transitional accommodation and support being developed, and experience in relation to these.

**Accommodation strategy**

The vast majority (almost 90 per cent) of departments reported on the questionnaire that they did have an accommodation strategy for care leavers. This being the case, they were asked to describe the key elements of this. A few authorities confined their responses to arrangements for permanent tenancies, a typical response being:

*Protocol established on housing enabling young people to be given priority housing status; rent guarantee provided; monitoring of housing*

More commonly, SSDs replied in terms of having a range of transitional accommodation as in the following:

*There is a range of semi-independent housing with varying levels of support; partnerships with local supported housing providers; priority nomination for all care leavers to council housing.*

Such strategies do not have the qualities of the accommodation strategies advocated by several writers in the homelessness field (McCluskey, 1993 and Kay, 1994) which are based on an audit of need. One department did report that, although it had and was continuing to develop a range of semi-independent accommodation, there was no strategy as such. This SSD - in an east London borough with a substantial homelessness problem - was therefore participating in a cross-departmental partnership to commission research into housing need in order to better inform us in creating a strategy. This was the only borough to report such an approach. The aims of the research being commissioned are described below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research towards a strategy for the accommodation and support needs of homeless young people, care leavers and young offenders</th>
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**Aims:**

- To collate information on the accommodation and support needs, (including support to access education, training and employment) of single homeless young people, care leavers and insecurely housed or homeless young offenders;
- Assess the supply and demand of accommodation and support services, the gaps in services and the type of accommodation and support services required to meet those gaps;
- Advise on information systems which will collate information;
- Advise on strategies to prevent and reduce youth homelessness.

A report by the Housing Corporation (1999) on the profile of the Registered Social Landlord (RSL) sector shows that the dominant type of supported accommodation used for care leavers is hostels and shared housing schemes rather than self contained units. However, as previously discussed, it was apparent that all boroughs were currently or had already expended a great deal of energy on the development of a
range of semi-independent facilities. Interviews revealed that some arrangements had been in place in some boroughs for some years; some developments had come into operation within the past year, and some other developments were at the stage of being negotiated or discussed. This presents difficulties in providing an accurate picture of what is currently available, but also reflects the wide range of provision being developed. Appendix 4.1 attempts to capture both these elements. Particular types of provision, and how well they are perceived to work, are discussed later in this section.

**Gaps in transitional accommodation**

Both the questionnaire and interviews sought information on whether SSDs experienced:

- Gaps in the *types* of accommodation available;
- Gaps in accommodation to meet the needs of *particular care leavers*.

On the questionnaire, two thirds of boroughs reported experiencing gaps in types of accommodation and over 80 per cent gaps in accommodation for particular groups. In interview, all boroughs commented on particular difficulties in both categories.

**Types of accommodation**

As far as gaps in types of accommodation were concerned, the following were mentioned by at least five boroughs:

- *Emergency accommodation*: here reference was specifically to direct access hostels which, according to the London Hostels Directory (RIS, 1999), offer places which can be accessed immediately, with vacancies usually on a daily or at least weekly basis. It is debatable whether such hostels represent an appropriate placement for young care leavers. However, according to several respondents, these hostels are now having to operate on a waiting list basis, and, in consequence, placements sometimes have to be made in B&B accommodation. It was acknowledged that such a placement was far from ideal for most young people, but that an added difficulty arose for SSDs in that B&B proprietors would not always take the type of young person for whom emergency accommodation was often necessary, those with high support needs.

- *Supported lodgings*: as is discussed further below, ‘supported lodgings’ was rarely specifically defined and several boroughs who did not currently have this facility were anxious to develop it. It was variously referred to as meeting high, medium and low support needs.

- *High support accommodation*: reference here was to the type of facility offering 24-hour support cover.

Two boroughs also mentioned the difficulty of finding appropriate vacation accommodation for young people attending University.
Accommodation for particular groups

There was considerably more unanimity about gaps in provision for young people with particular types of need. In this respect, most SSDs made reference to the needs of young people who were collectively described as having mental health problems: challenging and sometimes violent behaviour, drug abuse and possibly also offending (such as abuse of other young people/children). These were often considered not only to have high support needs but to be young people resistant to being worked with, and to be unsuitable for placement with other young people.

Other categories of young people mentioned in this context were:

- Those with moderate or borderline moderate learning difficulties: these were described as requiring a high level of low support sustained over time and it was often considered debatable whether they would ever be able to live independently;

- Asylum seekers/refugees: references to this group were twofold. First, the point was made that this group of young people were placing particularly heavy demands on the number of places required. A second issue was whether they could be placed in transitional accommodation with other non-asylum seeking/refugee young people on account of cultural differences/previous trauma/educational situation, or whether they were better placed with other asylum seeking/refugee groups;

- Pregnant young women/single parents: again the support needs of these particular care leavers were such that it was considered inappropriate to place them with other young people. In addition, there could be issues about their parenting skills which meant that assessment was necessary. As was pointed out by a number of respondents, London boroughs have amongst the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in the country, many of the young people concerned already being looked after, some becoming looked after because of their pregnancy.

Types of transitional accommodation and support

Supported lodgings

As Appendix 4.1 demonstrates, most London boroughs already have, or are giving active consideration to the development of supported lodgings. Interviews revealed that in practice very few were actually currently operating such a scheme: it was more that these were now being planned, and, indeed, several boroughs were receiving assistance through Quality Protects to develop this provision. Commenting on this development, respondents from the voluntary sector attributed this interest in supported lodgings to their relatively low cost to SSDs. As one put it:

I don’t like to be cynical but they would say that wouldn’t they. What could be cheaper than supported lodgings and who will they take - acting out teenagers? What support will they give? And will they be...
acceptable to young people? Supported lodgings are not going to be a panacea.

There was also some ambiguity in what was meant by supported lodgings: some boroughs were clearly referring to the recruitment of individuals who would provide lodgings and support and who would be matched with young people previously unknown to them; other boroughs were referring to the possibility of young people staying on in current placements. For the purposes of clarity, it is the former which is considered here, while ‘staying on’ is considered next.

According to Hutson (1995), the ingredients of successful lodgings are:

- Clarity about purpose and target groups;
- Staff time and expertise to manage the resource;
- A thorough approval system;
- Ongoing training and support for providers;
- Clear funding arrangements
- Planning move on accommodation;
- Reviewing and monitoring outcomes.

Those boroughs which already operated supported lodgings schemes described them as being most useful for fairly settled young people who have low support needs and are in settled employment or studying. One also reported using them for young people with borderline moderate learning difficulties. Overall they expressed the view that they can be a very valuable resource for a small number of care leavers.

Two boroughs operating these schemes also commented that they found foster parents had put obstacles in the path of young people accepting these placements, describing them as just another foster placement: there does seem to be some evidence to suggest that some foster parents may be resistant to such placements, thinking that they themselves should be supported to keep the young person longer. An interview with a professional social worker who also offered supported lodgings on behalf of a London borough revealed a prolonged absence of support to both young person and the carer by the SSD, despite contact being requested.

There also appears to be an issue around the recruitment and approval of those offering supported lodgings. Whilst in some cases the lodgings offered comprise an annexe to an ordinary domestic dwelling, they more generally mean the young person sharing with the householder (and their family) facilities for cooking, washing etc. In this respect, they are very similar to foster care. However, there was dissension amongst both these offering these schemes and those proposing to do so in the future around the appropriate procedures for checking and approving individual carers. Some envisaged a full foster care assessment undertaken by fostering specialists; others maintained that a watered-down foster care assessment undertaken by a member of the leaving care team would be adequate. It was also noted that some boroughs were proposing to contract the recruitment of these carers to housing associations and/or voluntary child care organisations. All these factors suggest that further clarity is required from central government in relation to this issue.
Like foster carers, those providing supported lodgings, also need support and
guidance in relation to specific young people. This further suggests that they need to
be provided with training: none currently appeared to be offered this.

A further variation on the supported lodgings scheme appeared to occur in one south London borough. Here it was reported that local small private children’s homes were
sometimes used for young people about to leave care. These homes - which may
accommodate up to three young people, are currently not registerable under the
Children Act although there are proposals within the Care Standards Bill to change
this. It is interesting to note in this respect that the 1997 national statistics on
children’s homes record a total of 89 small children’s homes in England & Wales, 32
of these being in London boroughs and 21 of these being in this particular London
borough, or those adjacent to it (for further discussion of small unregistered private
children’s homes, see Vernon, 2000). Again this highlights the need for further
information on the use of facilities used for young people and clarity on the standards
and regulations which should apply.

‘Staying on’ accommodation

Several writers (Fry, 1992; Broad, 1998, and Stein and Wade, 1999) have advocated
that, in the interests of continuity, young people in foster care should be enabled to
remain in these placements if this would meet their needs up to and, if necessary,
beyond the age of 18. Overall, there was little evidence in this project that SSDs
adopted this approach on a regular and consistent basis. A number did, however, refer
to the fact that if a move would be disruptive to examinations or a college course,
such an extension would be considered. There was some evidence to suggest that this
was more likely to be the case when young people were placed in foster homes outside London and/or were relatively high achievers educationally.

During the nineties, the National Foster Care Association launched two initiatives to
more actively involve foster carers in young people’s move to independent
accommodation, the *My Place* and *PAL* schemes, both of which are described below.

**NFCA 'My Place' scheme**

*An integrated preparation, housing and after-care scheme which aims to help young people by:*

- ensuring that each young person is well prepared for independent living and supported for a period after they have left foster home;
- utilising foster carers to both prepare young people for independence and to support them after they leave care;
- operating a partnership approach between the young person and their family, the foster carer(s) and their family, the local authority with the legal responsibility, housing associations and the NFCA

Although a number of SSD respondents made reference to the *My Place* initiative;
only one reported making extensive use of it. In this borough, it was said to be
possible to place the vast majority of looked after children and young people in foster
homes within the borough and the *My Place* scheme there takes the form of self-help foster carers group.

**NFCA 'Preparation for Adult Living' (PAL) scheme**

*Funded by the National Lottery, PAL aims to help young people leave care in a planned way.*

*It comprises a self-help pack for foster carers (residential workers and others) which emphasises the importance of preparation and provides information and training.*

No authorities specifically mentioned using the PAL scheme. Given relative dissatisfaction expressed by many respondents on the quality of preparation provided by foster carers, this may well be a very useful resource for SSDs.

**Supported accommodation**

The majority of growth in developing transitional accommodation over recent years appears to have occurred in the area of what many have come to refer to as *supported accommodation*. A range of accommodation types and accompanying support are included in this including what have been referred to in Appendix 4.1 as shared flats, shared houses (with varying degrees of shared facilities), and training flats. Different support arrangements can and do exist between and within these different accommodation settings.

There may also be a *floating support service*: a different form of provision whereby a young person is provided with self-contained accommodation on a shorthold tenancy basis, and support is provided on a tapered continuum until such time as the young person is considered able to manage independently. At this stage the tenancy agreement is changed to a permanent tenancy. The great virtue of floating support – and how it differs fundamentally from all other forms of supported accommodation – is that in it the young person remains in the one place and it is the support which changes. Other forms of supported accommodation require the young person to move.

To date, little detail has been provided on the types of supported accommodation made available to young people leaving care. Perhaps more importantly, with the possible exception of Hazelhurst and Tijani, 1998, there has been no systematic attempt to examine the relative effectiveness of different forms of supported accommodation in terms either of the outcomes for young people or of cost. Whilst it has been beyond the scope of this project to undertake any such evaluation, an attempt is made to document the different forms, to report on perceived strengths and weaknesses and to consider some of the issues presented. Whilst recognising the inter-relatedness of accommodation types (the physical facilities) and the support provided, each is considered separately initially.

*The physical facilities*
A number of different terms were in use here, and sometimes used interchangeably. One arrangement was *shared houses or flats*. One version of this entailed a minimum of two young people sharing a wide range of common facilities, including bathroom, kitchen, sitting room and dining room, but each having their own bedroom. In one instance such an arrangement housed seven young people. Some buildings were also divided into one or two flats (commonly in a basement or attic) and the remainder of the house was shared by other young people. A further variation of this was where each young person’s own accommodation was more akin to a self-contained bedsit and shared or communal facilities were kept to a minimum.

Issues arose in such buildings over gender mixes and changing occupancy (young people were not matched). Issues also sometimes arose over privacy: some young people, for example, did not like the fact that other occupants were aware of their earlier history and could relay this to others. Sometimes such facilities accommodated both care leavers and young homeless people, an arrangement which several housing association representatives reported on favourably. Such buildings also often included facilities for support staff but this is discussed further below.

Reference was also made to *training flats*. These tended to be single occupancy and entirely self-contained units, often a studio. They could also be provided on a cluster or dispersed basis. In the former, the flats were located in the same building, often purpose built; in the latter they could be single dispersed housing units across an estate or wider geographical area. Opinions varied about the relative strengths and weaknesses of cluster and dispersed arrangements. Cluster units - particularly those in purpose built buildings - were considered conducive to providing individual and group support. By the same token, they could lead to a concentration - and thus, escalation - of problems at both an individual and group level. On the other hand, dispersed units avoided this potential concentration of problems. However, they were often cited as leaving young people feeling lonely and isolated: in consequence, they could become open door for other young people whose behaviour the tenant could have difficulty managing. Although dispersed units of this kind were a relatively common form of provision, they were not always referred to as training flats; units provided on a cluster basis were described as training flats.

A number of SSDs reported having previously provided such accommodation themselves but this was now rarely the case. Difficulties with neighbours, with the police, and complaints to councillors had led most authorities to abandon this practice. Instead, they had begun to spot purchase from housing associations, and increasingly many were entering into block purchasing arrangements with such partners. This, in turn, was having an effect on arrangements for the support of young people.

**Support arrangements**

Three broad levels of support were in evidence: housing management, housing management plus, and resettlement services. With the benefit of Supported Housing Management Grant (SHMG), the second and, to a lesser extent, the third of these levels were undergoing considerable expansion. In broad terms, these levels can be defined as follows:

*Housing management*: here the tenant is monitored and supported in the payment of rent and the maintenance of the property.
**Housing management plus:** takes a more holistic approach to the tenant with assistance also being provided in relation to wider budgeting issues, to general daily living skills (cooking and shopping), to employment and training, and to interpersonal skills (getting on with neighbours, making friends and use of leisure). Housing management plus was often also referred to as Housing Plus and that term has been adopted in this report.

**Resettlement:** comprises all the elements of housing management and housing plus but in addition extends beyond the current tenancy to cover subsequent move-on accommodation until such time as the tenant is deemed able to live independently. Floating support, as previously described, is one form of resettlement service.

Most arrangements made between local authorities and housing associations now include housing plus, and although SHMG is available (currently via the Housing Corporation) for this, an additional contribution from SSDs was often reported as being necessary to meet the additional needs of care leavers. Indeed, while all housing association personnel commented on being keen to develop this aspect of their association’s service, they likewise commented on a resistance to this by their management committees, care leavers being seen as a group with particularly high support needs, and thus in the high risk tenant category. At the same time, most housing association personnel who were interviewed commented on the desirability of providing a full re-settlement service to care leavers: although not always paid to do this, most endeavoured to offer this albeit on a time limited basis as a matter of good practice.

A further range of developments have occurred as a result of housing associations becoming more actively involved in the housing support aspect of care leavers. The first of these is that some housing associations now have specialist teams to work with care leavers. The market for these services has been influenced by the Supporting People proposals which from 2003 will involve the transfer of the SHMG from the Housing Corporation to individual local authorities.

The situation in relation to the Supporting People is complex especially in the context of the Children (Leaving Care) Bill proposals. Supporting People results from a court judgement that some of the ‘support’ element of supported accommodation can not be met from Housing Benefit. It will therefore involve a new system of allocating this portion of funding and other associated budgets to providers through local authorities. The exact arrangements for administering this are still to be consulted upon but it is clear that there will be some form of needs assessment and a requirement that local authorities plan strategically to meet this need.

Furthermore, the Government’s leaving care proposals are that the local authority should provide for those going through the transition from care to independent living rather than leave the young person to sort out their own benefits. There is obviously an issue still to be addressed about how the young person moves from one system through to the other as time passes.

A second development has been to involve a third party whose remit is to provide the support component. This has sometimes resulted in the development of a three way
partnership between a local authority, a housing association, and a voluntary agency, typically a voluntary child care agency or, for example, Centrepoint. The two projects described by Hazelhurst and Tijani (1998) would be typical of this. A more recent variation of this development was also noted. In one instance, this had entailed the involvement of a further housing association whose client focus tended to be the 19-25 age range in order to provide specialist support; in another it had entailed involving another locally based youth agency in providing this.

The implication of each of these developments is that the support young people receive is not directly provided by SSDs. Some of the issues emerging from this are discussed below. However, prior to this, attention is drawn to another development which may alter the situation still further. There is some evidence to suggest that a number of SSDs may be planning to reduce the support provided to care leavers by any one of these external agencies and provide it themselves. According to housing association representatives, this is a misplaced cost-cutting exercise which emanates from SSDs’ reorganisation of leaving care service delivery in anticipation of legislative changes. The intention appears to be that housing support will be one of the functions of personnel operating at the after-care end of the leaving care continuum.

As Appendix 4.1 shows not all SSDs had or were developing all accommodation types. Despite being at different stages in accomplishing this, what all were endeavouring to achieve was a broad range of different levels of support. This having been said, only one SSD specifically stated that what was being aimed for was a range of low, medium and high support accommodation. More commonly, it was housing associations and/or support agencies who used this terminology. It was likewise they who worked out the detailed arrangements for delivering this support.

**Staffing**

A wide array of staffing arrangements was described. In respect of shared accommodation, these could include 24 hour staff cover; restricted day time staffing but evening and sleep-in arrangements, and day time availability at specified times. A further variation was the *responsible adult* concept. Here an adult was provided with rent free accommodation in return for providing a general oversight of the property and its residents: a caretaker plus role. The adults who performed this role were often relatively young people themselves: students or young professionals. Some were offered their tenancy on only a short term basis and some chose to move on themselves after a fairly brief period. In order to overcome the discontinuity that this created, one provider had entered into an arrangement with Community Service Volunteers to organise this aspect.

For staff providing overnight cover and for housing support workers different recruitment methods and arrangements were involved. The former were often taken on for this purpose only and were required to have some experience of working/dealing with young people. According to two providers who operated this system, such staff were often social work students or qualified social workers moonlighting from a day job. Insofar as housing support workers were concerned, providers generally operated on the basis that it was relatively easy to instruct staff in housing management, and so their emphasis in recruitment was again on people who
had experience of working/dealing with youth. They therefore tended to describe such staff as often being young themselves, to have undertaken work with young people in a voluntary capacity, or as being ex residential care or youth workers.

Beyond this a complete lack of consistency was noted in relation to the checks made on these staff and the training they were offered. For example, few providers reported undertaking police checks on any of this range of staff, although several reported always advising staff that they should not conduct interviews in young people’s bedrooms. The degree to which on the job training was provided was also highly variable: some reported close staff supervision but no training as such, whilst others reported engaging specialist organisations to deliver training on, for example, how to handle young people who wished to discuss previous abuse.

A clear dilemma exists here: as several providers pointed out, housing support workers appear to be much better than social workers at getting alongside young people; on the other hand, given the series of concerns over recent years about safeguarding children and young people in residential, and to a lesser degree, foster care, the fact that police checks on such workers are not undertaken as a matter of practice must give rise to concern. As one respondent put it:

> What this means in effect is that we are moving young people from the most highly regulated form of care to one which is completely unregulated. That cannot be right. It is a scandal - a tragedy - waiting to happen.

**Liaison with SSDs**

The extensive role undertaken by housing support workers in relation to care leavers also begs the question of liaison with SSDs and the role of the allocated social worker. For several of the housing providers this had been a source of tension, particular issues mentioned being:

- The quality and comprehensiveness of information provided about the young person at the point of referral;
- Achieving ongoing liaison;
- Unallocated cases.

Several providers now reported taking these matters up at a strategic level when negotiating or re-negotiating contracts with SSDs, or in the context of regular review meetings with managers. Whilst this was stated as having helped to some degree, it was also recognised that much was reliant on developing a better sense of trust and clear understanding of respective responsibilities at the practice level, a task which would have to be ongoing as staff changed. One of the concerns expressed by housing providers in this respect was that with the implementation of the Supporting People proposals, they would be less well placed to argue the case for certain conditions to be met by SSDs than is currently the case. In similar vein, housing providers were anxious about the fact that London boroughs currently appeared reluctant to work with only one support provider. As one put it:
They are adopting the stance of not putting all their eggs in one basket - making us compete with one another, constantly wanting more for less financial input from themselves. I can see their point of view and although I think that the Supporting People proposals will be positive in the long run - individual authorities are going to have a better grasp of local supported housing need than the Housing Corporation - it does put us in a very invidious position. We have to recruit and retain staff but we can have little confidence in the long-term security of our contracts. Set that against the wariness of the Trustees in relation to care leavers and it's a far from ideal situation at the moment.

In this respect, some of the recommendations of the Hazelhurst and Tijani report (1998) appear particularly apposite:

- Involvement of young people in the development, monitoring and evaluation of the service;
- Specification of the respective roles and responsibilities of different parties;
- Identification of those responsible for the development and maintenance of relationships;
- Ensure joint training and other regular contact between project and referrers;
- Develop relationships at both management and practitioner level.

**Foyers**

As Stein and Wade (1999) point out the foyer initiative in the UK is still a relatively new and untested one which has not arisen in response to care leavers but to the wider problem of homelessness and unemployment among young people. Thus, although many respondents from both SSDs and housing associations pointed to the availability or imminent availability of a foyer in their area, few SSDs had so far made use of them. Indeed, most expressed considerable scepticism about their appropriateness for other than a very small group of care leavers. In this respect, it is not clear whether their scepticism has a foundation or whether it is based on myth about the type of young people they understand foyers are looking to be referred.

Certainly the evidence on foyers in this country is so far limited but what it does highlight is that foyers deal with relatively low proportions of care leavers, rough sleepers and clients with a mental illness (Maginn et al, 2000) A particular concern of respondents in the Audit and Assessment was the size of foyers, many respondents recalling the circumstances which led to the campaign to close large scale hostels for young people in the past. The Maginn et al (2000) research highlights that foyers come in a range of sizes and that there are strengths and weaknesses associated with both ends of the size continuum. More importantly, the research highlights the advisability of basing foyer development on a detailed local needs analysis.
Contingency planning

In concluding this discussion of transitional accommodation arrangements reference is also made to the need mentioned in the literature (for example, Stein and Wade, 1999) for contingency planning whereby young people might be able to move from one transitional arrangement to another, should they require it. Although there were exceptions, most SSDs did not appear to perceive, or use, the range of transitional accommodation in this way. One authority did report that when a young person was resistant to accepting a high support form of care which the SSD deemed necessary, they would intentionally place them where they would fail, but then provide them with an alternative higher support option. This particular example highlights the complexities involved in matching individual young people with appropriate accommodation and support. Regrettably, it did not seem to be the case that authorities are always prepared, or in a position, to offer alternatives. The case studies presented earlier lend support to the view that this may not only result in a deep sense of failure for the young person involved, but also represent the start of a downward spiral in to all sorts of other difficulties.

The arrangements for independent accommodation

As Appendix 4.2 illustrates, most London boroughs reported satisfaction with the arrangements made with their counterpart housing department or with housing associations over permanent tenancies for young people leaving care.

Appendix 4.2 also shows that an almost equal number of boroughs operate on the basis of an annual quota system, or a suitable open arrangement. Indeed, if anything, a trend was evident of moving from the once much sought-after quota arrangement to a more open one. In this respect the recently issued guidance in relation to care leavers and accommodation (2000) may be less relevant to London boroughs than to other parts of the country where housing may be the responsibility of a different level of local government, such as, for example, district councils.

This is not to say that the granting of permanent tenancies was always a straightforward affair in London. For example, shortages of appropriate housing stock, particularly single person units, meant that there could be some delay in tenancies becoming available. Several departments reported that as a consequence they sometimes found it necessary to place young people in bed and breakfast or hostel accommodation, and that this might involve a period of several months. Likewise young people might have preferences for particular areas or, indeed, be living outside the local authority area.

For care leavers living outside the local authority area, it was sometimes possible to make arrangements with the local housing provider, perhaps on an exchange basis. However, a number authorities did report that if young people were to receive a permanent tenancy, it did necessitate them returning to their home borough, where they were encouraged to prove that they were able to manage and then to apply for a transfer.

The housing stock available in some authorities was also described as being largely tower blocks or other less desirable property. Some departments had managed to
ensure that young people were not placed in tower blocks, and to gain recognition that because of their past history, specific young people should not be placed on particular estates. One SSD also mentioned the need to avoid placing young black people on specific estates because of known racist activity there.

To assist young people to address some of these potential difficulties, some leaving care services had adopted the practice of ensuring that when young people first completed their housing application and visited specific properties, they were accompanied by a staff member. Another approach was to make the leaving care team the gateway to accommodation. Such steps were said to be helpful in ensuring that young people were aware of and realistic about the preferences they gave and the choices they made about housing. And since young people’s perception of what might be available and offered to them was described as often being highly unrealistic, this process was invariably referred to as one which brings young people down to earth with a bang. This was a particular issue in the case of young people being looked after by some of the poorer boroughs but who had been placed in more desirable locations outside London. The following are quotations from SSD personnel and housing providers which highlight some of the complexities involved in these circumstances:

*It can be very difficult for them - they spend years in leafy Chingford - and then the best we can offer them is a place in a tower block on a pretty grotty estate. They don’t know anybody, they don’t want to know anybody there and they can be a long way from what they consider to be home.*

(SSD manager)

*This is where the issue of being a good parent becomes problematic. In reality what we are able to provide them with and what they are able to afford falls far short of what they expect. Some of them are very unrealistic in their expectations. Just how far should a good parent be expected to go?*

(SSD officer)

*I just don’t understand Social Services - what does it say to young people about themselves when they are put in such dumps and then told that’s it, you’re grown up now, get on with it.*

(Housing support worker)

*There’s just no way you can describe social services’ treatment of young people as fair or equal. In one authority, they get the permanent tenancy of a beautifully decorated, well maintained and equipped property with direct street access; in another, they get offered a place in a tower block or grotty housing estate in conditions that no-one*
should be expected to live in and told “That’s it: it’s this or nothing – it’s up to you”.

(Housing Association manager)

Relations between social services and housing

The satisfaction by SSDs with the arrangement made with housing agencies in respect of permanent tenancies was generally described as being part of a wider and more general improvement in relationships between SSDs and housing departments of local authorities over recent years. In the case of London, one might attribute this to the fact that several boroughs operate a combined social services and housing department. However, respondents in these boroughs did not appear to consider that this had been a significant factor in improving relationships, particularly with regard to care leavers. The much improved relationship between social services and housing departments was attributed to a range of other factors. Better shared understandings on the needs of care leavers were said to have been reached with individual housing officers. Likewise the aforementioned practice of assisting or accompanying young people in relation to their housing application was said to have averted potential later complications.

Another step taken to minimise difficulties was to hold inter-departmental meetings where future need was forecast and any matters of common concern discussed. An extension of this - and a much more recent development - was the creation of joint or cross-agency accommodation panels, which sometimes covered transitional, as well as permanent housing and which sometimes included homeless young people generally, rather than care leavers specifically. Such panels have been recommended in a series of reports and in central government guidance, as have the development of joint protocols for assessing and reconciling the twin concepts of in need under the Children Act and vulnerability in housing legislation. In this project, panels set up to consider care leavers were cited as a productive starting point in establishing joint protocols and a framework for the joint assessment on the wider issue of homeless teenagers and young people.

Improvements in relations with housing were not confined to the granting of tenancies to care leavers. The majority of SSDs reported, for example, that considerable progress had been made with housing in relation to care leavers’ rent arrears. Previously, housing departments had been prone to issuing eviction notices without notifying Social Services, who then would be left to deal with a homeless young person - or, worse still, the young person was evicted and did not seek help. Now housing departments were more likely to advise SSDs of the possibility of eviction or, more ideally, to raise the alert about individual young people’s mounting rent difficulties. A further welcomed development was the consideration being given in a couple of authorities to the appointment of a Young Persons Tenancy Officer.

In some departments, however, there was a growing recognition that further work remained to be undertaken in relation to supporting care leavers in their permanent tenancies. For many, existing or planned floating support arrangements were seen as addressing this.
In preparation for legislative changes, a few SSDs had undertaken a follow-up survey of young people discharged from care some years previously. To their surprise, even some of what they had perceived as being the most settled and coping of care leavers, had lost or given up their tenancies after a couple of years. A number of these young people were ultimately tracked down: some had given up their tenancy in a relatively ‘planned’ way, because, for example, they were moving in with a partner. A considerable number had run into difficulties which had sometimes resulted in eviction. Perhaps even more significantly, SSDs had no record of these young people having approached the department for advice or assistance. The findings of these small scale projects have therefore highlighted not only the need for the availability of continuing support post-permanent tenancy, but also the importance of SSDs taking the initiative and maintaining contact with young people. The words of one previously looked after young person, now sleeping rough, is particularly apposite in this:

What you need is someone there that you can talk to and can help you. Not just when you know you’re already in trouble but when you can see the difficulties coming - and you shouldn’t have to go and ask, they should be there with you, ready for you, supporting you through it.

Young people’s experiences and views

The characteristics of the young people participating in this project have already been described in Section 2. Here some of that description is repeated in order to highlight the similarities and differences between particular groups of care leavers insofar as accommodation is concerned. This is followed by a discussion of what young people had to say about different aspects of obtaining accommodation: the advice and information they received about accommodation, what they thought about the accommodation they were offered, and what choice they felt they had in selecting it.

The charts below highlight the differences between the two groups of care leavers interviewed: those accessed through SSDs and those accessed through young people’s homeless agencies.

The charts on the gender of these young people shows a much higher percentage of males in the homeless group than is the case with the SSD-accessed care leavers. Some of the differences between the two sample groups may be attributed to the acknowledged over-representation of females in the sample of care leavers. However it is also likely that young men are disproportionately represented in the overall population of rough sleepers, a feature mirrored in our sample.
In terms of ethnic/cultural background, the classifications adopted were those provided by the young people themselves and hence it may be that more of the SSD accessed sample were mixed race than the chart implies. Likewise a not inconsiderable number of those interviewed had been unaccompanied asylum seeking minors, thus creating the high percentage of young people of African origin, not atypical of the clients being dealt with by the leaving care services of London boroughs.

The main point about these two charts, however, is that they highlight the numbers of care leavers who report that they have experience of homelessness or rough sleeping. The charts might also be interpreted as suggesting that homelessness may not be such an issue for young people with ethnic minority backgrounds. This runs counter to a number of other sources of evidence. For example, the number of young people from black and minority ethnic communities in hostels is consistently relatively high. Furthermore, homelessness agencies tend to report a slow and steady increase in the number of young people from minority ethnic groups seeking their advice and support. This would tend to suggest that there is an issue of hidden homelessness amongst these groups which needs to be further explored.
Figure 4.3 Distribution of ethnic/cultural background of those assessed
a) through SSD and b) through homeless agencies

The chart depicting the length of time which the young homeless people interviewed had
spent in care is of some significance. Many have assumed that the high proportion of rough
sleepers and homeless young people cited as being ex-care leavers is exaggerated and alleged
that the actual care experience of many of them was probably very limited. The evidence of
this small project is that this is definitely not the case: many had extremely long care
histories, extending over substantial periods of childhood. Likewise it should be noted that
those on the pie chart depicted as having been in care for less than two years were in fact
young people still under 18 years. The case studies of homeless young people presented
earlier in this section provided some insight into the background of these young people.
Interviews provided more detail and much to reflect on: abuse in and/or before care, self
harm and attempted suicide, prostitution (male and female) and drug abuse. The case could
indeed be made for stating that their experience of care had left them scarred.

Figure 4.4 Distribution of length of time in care (Homeless Young People)
These comments have clear implications for the implementation of the Government’s proposals in relation to rough sleeping. As one young person put it:

*What do you do? You’re abused at home so you get put in care. You’re abused in care, so you leave. You end up in a hostel and you can’t get away from drugs… I’ve no idea where I’ll be next week, next year or in ten years— What I do know is that there is nobody there to help me except myself and you won’t catch me going into a hostel again - never.*

As previously explained, the group of young people accessed through SSDs comprised some who were still in care and some who had already left care. The chart below shows that a high percentage were already in independent or semi-independent tenancies. This is not to say that none of these young people had been homeless: no less than three of the 28 who described themselves as having already left care said they had been homeless on at least one occasion.

**Figure 4.6 Current accommodation of SSD accessed young people**

Some of the young people in the homeless group maintained that they had been sleeping rough for extensive periods of up to several years. It is likely that were not actually on the streets all of this time, but that they were indeed homeless. Several of these young people made the point that they chose to sleep rough in preference to the alternatives that tended to be offered - hostels. Several had very bad previous experiences of hostels - some had been attacked by other residents and they recounted the perils of drug abuse.
What information/advice had young people been given about accommodation?

Although young people had rather mixed views on whether or not they had been given enough information and advice about accommodation, less than 10 per cent in each of the categories - those about to leave care, those who had already left care, and young homeless people - felt that they had had loads of information on this subject. By the same token almost 50 per cent, over a third and almost two thirds of these groups thought that they had not received enough information.

Interestingly, too, young people about to leave care were asked whether they knew where they would be living. Despite the fact that all of these were over 16 years old, only two of the eleven were aware of where they would be moving next and both of these were uncertain about when the move would occur.

Were young people given a choice?

Over 70 per cent of the young people interviewed felt they had been given no or very little choice on the accommodation provided as they left care. The following are some of the comments made by young people in relation to this:

*They should not make you take a grotty flat/house. You should get a flat that suits you.*

*They bunged me into a hostel. I would have preferred a bedsit. I didn’t mind the hostel, but it was the way in which we were just put there.*

*I wasn’t given a choice about accommodation - I was just told in a meeting that I was going into a hostel.*

*They shouldn’t give you just one choice - I was told I’d be considered intentionally homeless if I didn’t take it.*
What did young people think about the accommodation they were offered?

Over a third of the young people accessed via SSD’s were very pleased with the accommodation they had been offered. This percentage was significantly boosted by all eight young people in one authority responding very positively about the accommodation arrangements made on their behalf. In this particular SSD, a high proportion of care leavers are provided with housing association properties on a floating support basis. Collectively they described these properties as being:

Nice on the inside and outside. Everything new - washing machine, cooker - all that.

Otherwise the positive attributes that care leavers mentioned in relation to their accommodation included:

I liked it because of the location - near family and friends; two good flatmates; nice garden and near the tube and college.

I liked the privacy: it was tidy, furnished and had all the accessories

It’s very spacious basically the one bedroomed flat I wanted. and I was happy to be put on the third floor, not the 21st.

Having my mates round, going out and being able to come in when you want

It was my own space and freedom - it felt good.

It was fully furnished and had new things and everything was just for me, not sharing.

An extensive list of things young people disliked about accommodation was provided. These are presented below, using the young people=s own words:

That it was an estate

The fact that I can hear everything my neighbour does upstairs

Neighbours and thin walls

The standard of accommodation they’re handing out to people isn’t any good - they put me in a known kerb-crawling area.

Sharing with other people.

It was OK when I was on my own, but when I had to start sharing it was like a children’s home all over again
The obvious flatmate issues such as; “Are you going to do the washing up that you didn’t do yesterday”

Having to share with people who often didn’t clear up after themselves

Sharing the facilities and loud music from other tenants which is annoying, especially when I am doing my homework

There was too many boys in my case

The social worker told me I’d be there (hostel) for three months. I’ve been there for more than five months now. I’ve nothing against people who smoke dope but there are girls on either side of me who both smoke dope ... it makes me feel physically sick

They should put all the druggies in one, all the people in college in another: not mix them.

I had to share a room with another young woman who was on heavy drugs. It freaked me out. She scared me sitting there spaced out. I ended up having a breakdown.

I lived in a flat attached to a children’s home, but it was no good. You get segregated and then not allowed in the rest of the house. After living with ten other people you then want to socialise with them, so I kept coming out and watching the TV and nicking the food. It was lonely in the flat and I couldn’t stay there. They asked if I could cook, make a cup of tea but they didn’t task if you can sit in the flat for two hours alone.

Finally, this section ends with the comments of some young homeless people. Reflecting on their last days in care and what went wrong, these quotations highlight the importance of accommodation and support to ensuring that young people have a firm foundation from which to move forward into adulthood. They also exemplify the need to provide young people with opportunities to take risks and to experiment - but to ensure that there is a safety net available to support them when they need it.

They gave me a bedsit which is what I wanted. But I was worrying about money and being on my own. I let friends stay ... and it got out of hand.

They provided me with a flat. The flat was nice but the area - the estate was nasty - I didn’t want to be there. I didn’t know you could choose which area you wanted to live - I thought you just had to take it.

They put me in a B&B and said it would be a couple of years before I got my own flat. I was mad with them - then I got beaten up there and so I came to live on the streets.
They moved me to a hostel but I would have preferred to stay in the children’s home. I liked the help the hostel gave with budgeting and that. I liked the independence, but I didn’t like sharing a room and the curfew.

I wanted to stay in the children’s home but they put me in a shared house with four other boys when I was 16. I wasn’t ready for it: when you go to that sort of thing, you need somebody coming round on a day-to-day basis.

Concluding remarks

In the light of a considerable amount of evidence showing that young people who have been in care are at particular risk of homelessness, the Audit and Assessment had a specific focus on accommodation: What provision was made for young people’s accommodation? What support was available to them in managing that accommodation? How involved were young people in choosing that accommodation? And was it the accommodation that young people wanted? Overriding each of these individual questions was a core question: how can the corporate parents of looked after young people best help them to sustain accommodation on an independent basis?

What emerges from this section is that in London considerable progress has been made over a relatively short period of time in:

- developing a range of alternative transitional arrangements
- improving the opportunities for acceptable permanent tenancies

These are considerable achievements and have given rise to a not insignificant body of experience on which to draw. The issue addressed in these concluding remarks is how best to move forward from this situation. Four areas in particular are highlighted. These are:

- Moving from experience to knowledge;
- Developing a strategic approach;
- Identifying and meeting the needs of particularly vulnerable groups;
- Safeguarding young people.

Moving from experience to knowledge

Despite the increased experience brought by the above developments, it is also clear that our knowledge of what works best? and for whom? is different situations is still highly imperfect: much remains to be learned about assessing and supporting young people through transitional arrangements; about the range of transitional arrangements needed, how these can be best delivered and by whom; what arrangements best suit certain young people, why and over what timescales? There is a clear need then for further research which examines in detail the strengths and weaknesses of different forms of accommodation and support and which is based on the experience of young users. The evidence of the Audit and Assessment is that such research would be widely welcomed.
There is also scope here for local authorities themselves to collect useful information through their regular and ongoing consultation with care leavers. Several of those with whom we conducted interviews commented that accommodation was one of the issues on which they were rarely asked to express an opinion.

**Developing a strategic approach**

It is debatable whether individual authorities operating independently of one another are able to have in place the whole range of transitional arrangements which might be required by individual care leavers. Rather than confine arrangements to those most commonly required, an alternative approach in London, at least, would be for authorities to work together. To some degree this already happens indirectly through spot purchasing of some services provided by the voluntary sector and housing providers. There would seem, however, to be considerable scope for this to occur in a much more direct and planned fashion by, for example, adjacent boroughs jointly commissioning certain of the less frequently required services.

**Identifying and meeting the needs of particularly vulnerable groups**

Throughout this and other sections of this report, repeated references are made to those young people over whom SSDs experience particular difficulties. With regard to accommodation, these include young people with a range of difficulties subsumed under the general heading of mental health difficulties – offending, drug abuse, and so forth – and those for whom it is questionable whether they will ever be able to live entirely independently, such as those with moderate or borderline moderate learning difficulties. It would appear that – in the absence of appropriate placements – many such young people in effect fall through the net of leaving care services – ultimately to become the responsibility of another service, but sometimes not before considerable damage and deterioration has occurred. Identification and assessment of these young people at an earlier stage might serve to address some of these difficulties before they became so problematic for SSDs, and so acute for the young people concerned. Likewise, with respect to the services required by some of these young people, there would appear to be a case for the development of a pan-London approach.

**Safeguarding young people**

This section has also highlighted a paradox inherent in some of the accommodation options currently being developed for care leavers whereby they are being moved from one of the most highly regulated forms of social care to situations where there is at best a lack of consistency and clarity about the arrangements which should be in place to protect them. Ultimately, this is an issue for which central government may need to assume responsibility. In the interim, it is an issue to which all SSDs, voluntary child care organisations and housing providers need to devote their attention. The desirability of having a range of accommodation options is certainly indicated by the *Audit and Assessment*, but there are perils in achieving this at the possible expense of safeguarding young people’s personal safety which cannot be ignored.
APPENDIX 4.1: Range of semi-independent accommodation currently available/under negotiation/ consideration

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<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>spot purchases</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>spot purchases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# APPENDIX 4.2: Arrangements for permanent tenancies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authority</th>
<th>Annual quota system</th>
<th>Suitable ‘open’ arrangement</th>
<th>Unsuitable ‘open’ arrangement</th>
<th>Joint assessment panel</th>
<th>Other comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>May place at 17; also use private sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>v (25)</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>Lot of work with Housing re homeless youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>Developing work re youth homelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>Joint department - good relations generally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>Long waiting list - limited housing stock; will place in private sector in interim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>No fixed arrangement but works well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>Lot of joint work re youth homelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>To be addressed this year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>100 ‘introductory’ tenancies at any one time; plans to introduce panel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>100 ‘introductory’ tenancies at any one time; plans to introduce panel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>v (20)</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>May organise tenancy in adjacent boroughs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>v (15)</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>Lot of pressure on housing stock; many young people don’t want borough placement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>v (10x2 bed, 20x1 bed)</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>No panel as such but young people accompanied to housing interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>Also private sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>Also use housing associations and private sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>v (6)</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>Lack of suitable accom in borough; will place at 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>Will provide at 16 if ‘capable’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>v (12)</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>SSD underwrite if placement under 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>v (15)</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>Limited stock; young people not keen on tenancy in borough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>v (15)</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>Places within 2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>Shortage of housing stock; long waiting time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>Tenancies mainly on estates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>v (16)</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>Long waiting list/use private sector too. Joint panel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>v (10-15)</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>Can be 3-6 month delay. Also use HA s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>Young people not keen on tenancy in borough</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Financial support

Research has shown the association between education, training and employment (discussed in the next section) and the tendency for young people to remain financially dependent on local authorities for some time after leaving care (Garnett, 1992; Biehal, 1995, and Broad 1998). The current legislative framework, the Children Act 1989, gives local authorities a range of discretionary powers to assist young people in relation to housing, education, training and work. One of the objectives of the new legislation for care leavers is to improve the financial arrangements and support available to them. This is likely to be reflected in significant changes to the duties placed on local authorities. This section deals with the current situation. In particular, it looks at the arrangements for leaving care grants, at how SSDs advise and support young people in relation to finance and budgeting, and how young people feel about this service.

Ensuring entitlement

The current arrangements for the financial support of care leavers necessitate a sound knowledge of both state and local authority entitlement rules. These are difficult enough for adults to grasp, much more so for vulnerable care leavers taking their first steps towards independence. The importance of social workers, young people and those who look after them, having regular access to clear and accessible information about their entitlement is therefore self-evident. Recent inspection evidence (SSI, 1997) suggests that young people, social workers and carers, in particular foster carers, often lack information about what is available from SSDs and the criteria used to assess eligibility for these.

This evidence is borne out by the Audit and Assessment in a number of ways. For example, SSDs were asked to name the three main ways in which their department informs young people about the financial support available to them. By far, the most frequent response was verbally. Likewise, whilst analysis of leaving care policies sometimes revealed a brief guide to the range of benefits available and the procedures to be followed in accessing them, this was far from comprehensive. Perhaps this is not altogether surprising given the complexity of the subject matter. Similarly, guides available to young people rarely listed the potential benefits - or their value - that might be available from the local authority. It was also clear that not all young people received approved departmental guides designed for them: For example in discussion groups, young people from the same authority often became aware of a guide for the first time, when a fellow care leaver made reference to it. The Audit and Assessment would therefore endorse the recommendation of Stein and Wade (1999) that leaving care policies and guidance should both make clear:

- The range of financial support that is available;
- The criteria used for assessing entitlement;
- The groups of young people that are eligible to apply;
- Clarify how this links with entitlements from other agencies;
- Provide information about how to make claims.
Inter-agency collaboration

It has also been suggested (First Key, 1996; Department of Health, 1997) that formal links and protocols with other relevant agencies, in particular the Benefits Agency, Housing Benefit Department, the Education Authority, would greatly facilitate entitlement to a range of financial assistance. Most of the London boroughs did appear to have a line of communication with Housing Benefit Department and at least five had recently come to an agreement with the local office of the Benefits Agency to fast-track claims by care leavers. There was less evidence of designated links with the Education Authority over financial support for training and education. Table 5.1 below summarises how SSDs described their satisfaction with the degree of inter-agency collaboration in relation to meeting care leavers financial support needs. It shows that there is scope for improvement in this complex area.

Table 5.1 SSD satisfaction with inter-agency collaboration on care leavers’ financial support needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite satisfied</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite dissatisfied</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Young people’s views

Table 5.2 summarises what young people had to say about the information provided to them on entitlement to the range of benefits. The table shows that almost half the young people interviewed thought they had not had enough information.

Table 5.2 Young people’s perceptions of the amount of information provided about benefits, grants etc

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Numbers</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loads</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enough</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>57</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The views of the young people contrast sharply with the views of the boroughs, who were generally satisfied with this aspect of the service. It also underlines the importance of timely advice. As one respondent put it:

*I’d say I had enough information. What’s more important is that you get what you need and you get it when you need it.*

## Leaving care grants

One of the most universal ways in which local authorities can assist care leavers is through a leaving care grant. Although several authorities did not supply the necessary information, Appendix 5 shows the wide variation in the amount of grant young people can expect to be given by different authorities.

The average sum received from authorities ranged from £165 - £1600. In addition to the variation between authorities, it is important to note that there is considerable variation within authorities themselves. Some of this can be explained by virtue of the status of individual young people, and whether or not they are eligible for a Community Care Grant: most SSDs appear to adopt the practice that if a young person is eligible for a Community Care Grant, then all that is necessary is to top this up. Similarly some departments operated a graduated system of leaving care grants. The following, for example, is an extract from the leaving care policy of a north London borough:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Available grants and assistance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The following grants and assistance can be provided to young people:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. A setting up home grant to furnish the property.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. A grant to purchase small household items such as crockery, cutlery and bedding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The deposit and advanced rent payment &amp; deposit for gas and electricity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Contents insurance for young people under the age of 18 and /or cost of locks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More commonly, it appeared to be the case that a limited amount of funding is available to young people until such time as they are in a position to take up an offer of a permanent tenancy. In addition to this, a number of housing associations pointed out that when a young person takes up a semi-independent tenancy, the housing association supplies them with
bedding and a range of household equipment. We were informed that this was not always something claimed back from the local authority.

Similarly, in discussion groups, young people frequently bemoaned what appeared to be inequities within the same department, young people often attributing this to who your social worker was. As one put it:

*I know someone who moved into a permanent tenancy about the same time as me. They got a lot more than me: most of my stuff was second-hand, hers was brand new. I think a lot depends on whether your face fits.*

There were also issues about how money was spent and the say that young people had in determining this. Sometimes, for example, foster carers were said to *take over.* Generally speaking, however, some fairly strict guidelines tended to exist on how the leaving care grant could and could not be spent. The following list is a replication of the guidelines provided by one department to cover the case of a young person moving into unfurnished accommodation, and the spending of the grant, which in this department was high, being set at a maximum of £1500.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bedroom</th>
<th>Kitchen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Single bed &amp; mattress</td>
<td>1 Cooker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Single wardrobe</td>
<td>1 Fridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Chest of drawers</td>
<td>1 Set of saucepans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Set of single sheets</td>
<td>1 Frying pan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Quilt covers</td>
<td>1 Set of cutlery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Single blankets</td>
<td>1 Kitchen tool set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Bath towels</td>
<td>1 Set of cups, plates and saucers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Face Towels</td>
<td>1 Electric kettle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Living Room</strong></td>
<td><strong>Bathroom</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 3 Piece suite</td>
<td>1 Bath Mat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Coffee Table</td>
<td>1 Bathroom accessories set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Carpet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Electric heater</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tables 5.3 and 5.4 show that the type and level of financial support available to care leavers was not described as being a major issue of concern by SSDs.
Table 5.3 SSD satisfaction with type of financial support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite satisfied</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite dissatisfied</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.4 SSD satisfaction with level of financial support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite satisfied</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite dissatisfied</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Young people, on the other hand, had many concerns about both the type and level of support they obtained. The Audit and Assessment did not routinely collect information on the financial support London boroughs made available to care leavers wishing to continue in education/training. However, as some of the following quotations from young people demonstrate, this was a very important issue for many of them.

*I don’t know if it’s the social workers or the managers: they tell you that they might be able to help and then that they can’t.*

*I’m still in education and I heard from somebody that you can get help for that – nobody’s ever told me that before.*

*It’s really scary – you’ve no idea how much you will have - nobody tells you - how are you expected to know these things. I was in a children’s home and you never had money of your own. When you wanted money, you just asked for it. It’s a crazy system.*

*They do top up my money but I had to fight to get that. I had my place (college) - I organised that myself but it wasn’t till the last minute that they said they would help. I know somebody who started his course without knowing that they would help. They did eventually agree but then he had to*
give up his place because they wouldn’t backdate it and he’d had to get into debt to survive.

I don’t understand how it works. My social worker was quite helpful, she explained what I would get and helped me to get set up in my flat. But I think I was lucky. I know loads of other people who didn’t get nearly as much as me. That’s not right.

I was just told to go to the benefit office and then they kept asking me had I been. I think it would have been a lot better if they had gone with me and then we could have gone to McDonald’s or something like that to talk about it.

These quotations illustrate the confusion for young people of a system that is highly dependent on discretionary allowances. It means that those they see as being there to support them, also act as gatekeepers to the support available. This is undoubtedly one of the tensions of a system, which has the potential to be sensitive to individual need but is set within a context of tight budgets.

In reviewing this system, it will be important to take steps to ensure both the visibility of the entire range of support available, and that young people have access to an independent source of advocacy.

**Budgeting**

Notwithstanding the types and levels of financial support available to care leavers through a range of benefits and grants, interviews with young people left no doubt that they require support in managing their income and outgoings. Table 5.5 summarises what young people had to say about the support available to them in this respect.

Table 5.5 Young people’s perceptions of the information/support available on managing money

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numbers</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loads</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enough</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many of the young people interviewed acknowledged that SSDs had provided advice on this topic. It seemed, however, to often be a case of too much, too late. It would seem that young people in care gain very little experience of managing money in the course of growing up. They do not necessarily receive pocket money, have been provided with few insights into
what might be described as household management or home economics and hence have had limited opportunities to experiment with money. Suddenly, a huge amount of information is thrown at them when they are expecting. One young person put it:

\[\text{To be free and at long last be my own person}\]

As several of the young homeless people pointed out, to then be faced with someone telling them about the harsh economics of life simply acted as a complete turn off and, on their own admission, they just did not listen to the advice being given.

It was quite evident from both SSDs and housing associations that a considerable amount of time is spent on delivering advice and support on budgeting at both an individual and group level. Clearly young people need this support and it should be available. However, it does seem that if greater attention was devoted to this general subject at a much earlier stage, later advice might be more effective.

**Concluding remarks**

The needs of and services available to care leavers in relation to financial support are both very large topics and the Audit and Assessment was able to touch on only a few of the relevant dimensions. This having been said, and acknowledging that a major overhaul of the system of benefits and support is imminent, there are three main messages from the data.

- **Discretionary grants**

  It is clear that much of what is currently available is on a discretionary basis only. Young people find this highly confusing. There would also appear to be a lack of clarity within SSDs about the whole range of benefits and the criteria on which they are available. Few departments were able to provide a budget on leaving care services. Often it would seem that decisions might be made on the basis of fear of setting a precedent and an eye to overall costs, rather than on the basis of need and the principles of good parenting. This is not to suggest that the discretionary element be removed: discretion is necessary if the service to care leavers is to be needs-led. What it does mean, however, is that what is available needs to be visible and clear to all involved – care leavers and professionals alike. Some young people might also benefit from access to independent advocacy should they need to appeal in the event of particular benefits being denied.

- **Managing money**

  A second area highlighted is the preparation that care leavers receive in relation to managing money. There can be little doubt that existing leaving care services devote a considerable amount of energy to this in terms of both endeavouring to prepare young people and in subsequently assisting them with financial difficulties. Preparing young people to manage money is not, however, the exclusive domain of the staff of leaving care teams. It is the responsibility of a good parent. As such, considerably more attention needs to be given to this in the course of young people in care growing up. This is a subject which needs to sit alongside matters such as health, education and emotional development in the course of statutory reviews of any child in public care.
Poverty

It would be wrong to conclude this section without making reference to the self-evident, although often overlooked fact, that when young people leave care, they do so to live in poverty. Low youth wages, student grants and the benefit system contrive to ensure this.

Increasing the level of financial support and lengthening the period in which support is available from parent SSDs are two major steps proposed to address this.

The importance of the issues raised above cannot be underestimated and it is local authorities, as corporate parents, who already have the power to address them. Young people have a right to expect that a good parent would exercise any new such powers in order to fulfil even further its parental responsibilities.
## Appendix 5: Leaving Care Grant arrangements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amounts received</th>
<th>£</th>
<th>Average received</th>
<th>£</th>
<th>% of y p in receipt of LCG</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. 100 - 500</td>
<td>n/k</td>
<td>n/k</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 163</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>+£999 setting up home allowance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 1000</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Can be held in account</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. 28 – 1462</td>
<td>476</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. 1000</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. 1300</td>
<td>1300</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. n i</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. 500-1500</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>Poss 50%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. n i</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Max 600</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td>Poss 35%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. 100 – 750</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td>Graduated scale</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. 500 – 1200</td>
<td>800 - 1000</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. 250 – 1000</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. 150 – 1000</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Max 1500</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. 635 - 950</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. 200 - 700</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Individually assessed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. 100</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. 1182 - 1880</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. 1500</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td>Furniture grant when permanent tenancy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. n i</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. 500 – 1200</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. n i</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. 1200</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. 500 – 1000</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td>Those in permanent accommodation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. 400 – 1500</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. n i</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. n i</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. 1000 – 1250</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td>100% of those eligible</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. 1000</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>When move to permanent accommodation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. n i</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. 100 – 1100</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>n i</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. 1750</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>On moving to independent accommodation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Support in education, training and employment

Children and young people enter the public care system for a wide range of reasons. However, research has consistently shown that they tend to leave care having made poor educational progress, lacking qualifications, and having limited career opportunities (Stein and Carey, 1986; Jackson, 1998/9; Garnett, 1992; Aldgate et al 1993; Jackson, 1994; Stein, 1994; Biehal et al 1995; Broad, 1998). Just how marked this tendency can be is highlighted by the following statistics:

- More than 75% of care leavers leave school with no formal qualifications, as compared with some 16% of pupils overall;
- Fewer than 20% continue in full time education after age 16, compared with about 70% for the population as a whole;
- Between 50-80% of 16-24 year old care leavers are unemployed, as compared with 15-20% of 16-19 year olds more generally.

This start to the transition from childhood to adulthood does not augur well for the young people concerned. It can mean the beginning of a downward spiral, which leads to enduring poverty, homelessness, early parenthood and drug and alcohol misuse.

The need to tackle these issues has been addressed in the Government’s *Quality Protects Initiative* which requires local authorities to raise standards of participation and performance in education, training and employment and to establish clear targets against which improvements can be assessed. Improved arrangements are also being encouraged for the financial support of young people participating in further and higher education. Similarly, detailed practice guidance on the education of looked after children was issued jointly in May 2000 by the two central governments departments involved: the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Employment.

This section describes what steps London boroughs are taking to address this. In particular, it discusses the relative emphasis being placed by SSDs on working with care leavers and/or on the general population of looked after young people; at their satisfaction with these arrangements (including those for young people with special educational needs), and at inter-agency collaboration on this topic. The section begins by looking at what young people had to say about the advice and assistance they received in relation to education, training and employment.
Young people’s perspectives in relation to ET&E

Overall, young people rarely raised issues of education, training and employment (ET&E) spontaneously. Perhaps this is indicative of their low aspirations in this respect. Indeed, research has suggested that these low aspirations are themselves a reflection of adult’s low expectations of care leavers. This appeared to be borne out in the Audit & Assessment, where once the subject was raised, young people had no difficulty in expressing their views on ET&E. They tended to focus on three specific issues:

- The lack of priority ascribed to education by SSDs;
- Lack of financial support in further and higher education;
- Inadequate support in career planning and employment.

Each of these is discussed below.

The lack of priority ascribed to education by SSDs

This was not an issue for all young people, but it was one about which some felt particularly strongly. Their points can perhaps best be conveyed in the words of the young people themselves:

_I went to six schools from when I was eight and I first went into care - to when I left. It didn’t help._

_Why is it that they always move you just before exams - I was only two days off my GCSEs and they came and told me I’d be moving within the next three weeks. That wasn’t right - I knew nothing about that before then and I’d been there three years - it wasn’t even as if they told me where I was going._

_You need a role model - you need to have something to strive for. Nobody’s helped me at that - sometimes they’ve laughed at me for what I’ve said. That’s terrible - everybody needs a dream - why do they have to laugh just because I’m in care. I’m my role model now – I’m going to do it._

_I went to college - but I had to keep moving where I lived. Then I was in a place with a lot of other young people but none of them were at college. I just couldn’t cope with it. I asked Social Services to move me but they said it would work against me getting a flat. So I just drifted out of college, then I got a flat but I couldn’t manage money-wise and was eventually evicted. I suppose that’s how I ended up on the streets._
Lack of financial support in further/higher education

A disproportionate number of those who attended group discussions were already in further/higher education. Even when they felt that they themselves had been appropriately dealt with, they recounted the experiences of others who they considered to have been less fortunate. Several instances were cited in the previous section of young people who were held waiting until the last minute, or even later, to hear that they would be financially supported in education. One young person said:

*I think what happens is that even although you’ve got the qualifications and the college has accepted you, they look at it all over again and decide whether they’re prepared to support you. That’s wrong, if you’ve been able to get a place, then you should be able to take it - it shouldn’t matter whether you’re in care or not.*

Inadequate support in career planning and employment

Table 6.1 below summarises how young people responded to questions about the level of support they felt they had received from SSDs about education, training and employment. Overall, this table shows that for most young people, the biggest area of concern was employment. In particular, their concern was that whilst some advice and/or information might have been made available, it was rarely the most appropriate type of support, or it was incomplete support. They spoke, for example, of being advised to go to the Careers Service and of being encouraged to look for a job. However, what the young people often wanted in this respect was some *handholding*. The following quotations are illustrative of this:

*They never said anything to me about jobs or anything like that - just that I had to go to the Benefit place. They gave me the address and that was it really - I think she (social worker) saw me as a bit of a no-hoper.*

*They’re always telling you about jobs and training and sometimes it’s very helpful - it gives you a sort of idea. How to write an application and all that - but it’s an awful lot of talk. I mean they don’t do anything. That’s all down to you.*

*I used to see my social worker most weeks and she’d say have you seen any jobs? Have you been to the job centre? Have you been to the Careers Service? That was all she wanted to know - had I been. Not how I got on. For a long time I didn’t go - I didn’t know what to expect - it was scary - but you don’t like to say. If they went along with you the first time I think it would be better - just give you a bit more confidence.*

*I know they can’t get you a job - but even if they were to go with you sometimes - be there to back you up after - it would get you going better.*
Table 6.1 Young people’s perceptions of the amount of support provided in relation to education, training & employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>ET&amp;E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loads</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enough</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Steps being taken by SSDs to support care leavers in relation to ET&E

Given the priority currently accorded to the education of children and young people in public care on the national policy agenda, not surprisingly SSDs were giving this matter considerable attention. A variety of responses and different types of approach were adopted in the course of the Audit & Assessment. What some described as first steps are discussed. Consideration is then given to steps being taken in relation to care leavers, and to those with special educational needs.

First steps

Several fundamental tasks were identified as the first steps in promoting the education of looked after children:

- Improvement of information on educational attainment on all young people leaving care;
- Working collaboratively with LEA’s;
- Building relationships with schools;
- Recognising the need for education to be addressed throughout a child’s care career.

Improving Information

A first step that many authorities were having to take was to ensure that they had information about young people’s educational achievements: some were considerably more advanced in this respect than others. Part of the problem here appears to be that leaving care specialists were for the most part dependent on information being provided by locality fieldworkers, and frequently these workers did not have the information to pass on in the detail required. One manager had this to say on the subject:

*I’d admit that this department has been rather slow to implement the Assessment and Action records. But there are huge gaps we now realise in*
relation to education etc. We’re trying to address this now – it’s become a real priority.

Up to a third of departments made a similar point.

A further issue is the recognition that the Leaving Care Teams are aware of only a proportion of the local authority’s care leavers. In this context several departments drew attention to the fact that they had recently appointed or taken the decision to appoint independent reviewing officers for all children in care. This was described as being a measure which, in the medium to longer-term, would greatly assist in resolving current difficulties and enable the departments to plan better for young people’s education, training and employment at a later stage.

*Working with LEA’s*

Some departments also mentioned that they were endeavouring to work more closely with colleagues in the education department over this matter. This having been said, when asked on the postal questionnaire to comment on any two inter-departmental or inter-agency relationships which they thought needed to be developed or further developed, more than one in two SSDs made reference to the LEA. Earlier research (Vernon and Sinclair, 1998) has shown that much progress has been made in recent years in the collaboration at a strategic level between SSDs and LEAs but that there remain major issues to be resolved in the links between individual schools and SSD locality teams insofar as individual children and young people are concerned.

*Working with schools*

In the Audit and Assessment, only one borough made any reference to links with schools. This would suggest that much remains to be done in this respect. This is particularly the case given the high incidence of school exclusion among looked after young people, and school exclusion has been highlighted as one of the main risk factors in relation to subsequent homelessness (Breugel and Smith, 1999). Although it was not reported as such, it may also be that departments (both LEAs and SSDs) have been awaiting the outcomes of recent and forthcoming national policy initiatives in relation to Social Inclusion/Pupil Support and the Guidance on the Education of Children in Public Care respectively. Both of these will have a major focus on schools.

*Earlier education support*

The foregoing issues do, however, highlight what a few SSDs described as a current dilemma in relation to developing leaving care services, ensuring education is addressed throughout a child’s career. As one put it:

*We do already try to help care leavers in relation to training and employment – it’s quite a significant part of what the Leaving Care Team already does. But in a way it is fire fighting. What we’re hoping is that if we put more of our efforts into an earlier stage - making more of their education and schooling - we can get away without doing too much more at the leaving care stage. That’s the theory - we may well end up with egg on our faces*
It was beyond the scope of the *Audit and Assessment* to examine what SSDs were doing at this earlier stage, although clearly if the educational achievements of and outcomes for young people are to improve, that process has to begin much earlier than at the point they are being prepared to leave care.

Two initiatives which are occurring in this respect are worthy of note. The first was established some years ago and involves the setting up by an East London borough SSD of its own Education Support Team for Looked After Children. Employing several professionally qualified teachers, this initiative represents a major development but current information is that is has not been evaluated. A further initiative, in which one London borough is involved, is a national one and about to commence. The *Ideal Authority Project*, funded by the Sainsbury Trust, is a three year collaboration between LEAs, SSDs and the National Children’s Bureau which seeks to develop ways of improving the educational outcomes of looked after young people. Separate evaluation of this project has been agreed.

**Focusing on care leavers**

Table 6.2 summarises SSDs’ response to the question how satisfied were they with the current arrangements for providing support to care leavers in relation to ET&E.

### Table 6.2 SSD satisfaction with ET&E arrangements for care leavers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite satisfied</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite dissatisfied</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>33</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It shows that less than one in five boroughs were very satisfied with current arrangements and that almost a third expressed some form of dissatisfaction. The most common steps that departments were taking were trying to improve liaison with the local Careers Service and employing a specialist in employment and training within the leaving care team. These arrangements were often reported as taking some time to work out, some boroughs awaiting the arrival of Leaving Care team managers to take this forward; in others the responsibility resting with a manager with wider child care responsibilities.

**Initiatives to support ET&E**

Amongst those initiatives already in operation were a number of interesting examples, sometimes involving several partners. Three examples are discussed below.
Coram Family have been offering local authorities in London a range of services in relation to leaving care for a number of years. These include supported accommodation and after care services. Recognising the education needs of these young people, the project set up a new Education Support Service employing several qualified teachers. The service has been in operation for a few years and has recently undergone an internal review looking at some of the lessons learned in these years. In consequence the service has been slightly re-structured, with additional staffing and is looking to expand in scope.

**Coram Family Leaving Care Project’s Education Support Service**

Many of the young people referred to CLCS are educationally disaffected and unmotivated with very low self-esteem. The education support service was set up to redress the educational disadvantages experienced by care leavers. It provides individual teaching in literacy and numeracy with progression towards nationally accredited schemes and qualifications.

**The Admovere Project**

A collaborative venture between LEA, SSD and local Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) with funding from the EEC and the Standards Fund. The project has an employment and training focus and was originally set up to assist in enabling Year 11 students - regardless of their looked after status - to achieve academically.

Locally this scheme, which adopts a youth-work approach, is seen to have been very successful with several of the young people gaining considerable confidence from the project’s international aspect, and travel associated with this. Using further funding, one and a half members of staff have now been employed to focus on young people in care. Ultimately it is hoped that the project can be expanded to include all young people in care aged 16 plus and that it will take on the role of both education and employment and personal advisors, as proposed in forthcoming government initiatives.

Several departments reported on the joint appointment or secondment of careers officers to the Leaving Care Team. One particularly interesting development in this respect was where one local Careers Service provider had formed links with the leaving care team of each of the four south London boroughs in its area.
South Bank Careers Service
Work with Care Leavers

Although the details of the scheme vary slightly from borough to borough, the broad arrangement is that a qualified careers worker is seconded to each of the Leaving Care Teams concerned on a full time basis to work with care leavers. In two authorities the scheme has been operating for a year; in the other two it began at the start of this financial year. Workers first develop a database of young people in order that they can maintain a record and monitor outcomes, but an important component of the scheme is that it involves group and outreach work, in addition to seeing young people individually in the context of the office.

Although an evidence base is being built up in the project on individual young people, none of the individual projects - nor the scheme overall - is being monitored and/or evaluated. This seems particularly unfortunate given the potential of this innovative approach to highlight the messages for practice at both a local and national level. More specifically, monitoring and evaluating the scheme would demonstrate:

- The impact of the scheme in placing care leavers in employment and/or training in four different local authorities;
- The extent to which young people manage to sustain placements made and the assistance they require/receive in doing so;
- The implications of such a scheme for the work pattern of other related professionals, such as social workers and teaching staff in schools and colleges.

Work experience, mentoring

Other initiatives mentioned in this general context were providing young people with work experience and mentoring. A number of SSDs, for example, recognising the limited work experience of care leavers, were encouraging other departments of the local authority to offer them time-limited work placements. Such a project was well established in one west London borough, although somewhat ironically, one department that had not so far signed up to it was the LEA. A significant number of authorities made reference to forthcoming mentoring schemes; however most were currently more at the stage of recruiting and training mentors than matching these with young people. One authority that was rather more advanced in this respect commented that the initial reaction of young people to mentors had not been particularly enthusiastic, so the scheme had been rather slow to take off.

Several respondents took the opportunity when discussing mentoring schemes to refer to potential ambiguities between mentors, Personal Advisors as envisaged by the Connexions proposals, and Young Person’s Advisors as proposed for care leavers in Me? Survive Out
While most authorities had tentative proposals for how these different roles would work out, most expressed the view that they were looking to the range of government departments involved to provide clarification in relation to these issues. The work of Barham and Morgan (1999) on personal advisors in pilot areas would appear to confirm the need for this clarification.

**Inter-agency collaboration**

It is clear from the above that in taking steps to improve the support available to care leavers, most SSDs recognise that they themselves do not currently have the skills, expertise, or time to deliver what is necessary. They are therefore quite frequently contracting this aspect of the service out to other specialist providers and seeking inter-agency collaboration. Table 6.3 summarises their reported satisfaction with this dimension.

**Table 6.3 SSD satisfaction with inter-agency collaboration on care leavers’ ET&E support needs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite satisfied</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite dissatisfied</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>33</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, this looks likely to be an area of continued development not least as departments will have to experiment with what works best in different environments. It will be unfortunate if this development takes place in the context of everyone re-inventing the wheel.

**Meeting the needs of those with special educational needs**

Table 6.4 summarises the extent to which SSDs described their arrangements for meeting the ET&E of care leavers as including those with special educational needs.

The table shows that departments were almost equally divided in this respect between those who said that arrangements were inclusive, and those that said they were not or were in some way unsure how to reply to this question. Table 6.5, which summarises their satisfaction with arrangements for those with special educational needs, reflects a similar tentativeness.
Table 6.4 Do SSD arrangements for meeting the ET&E needs of care leavers include those with special educational needs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partly</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.5 SSD satisfaction with ET&E arrangements for care leavers with special educational needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite satisfied</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite dissatisfied</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the basis of subsequent interviews, it appeared that two factors were significant to this. First, care leavers with *significant* disabilities tend not to be dealt with by leaving care teams but by specialist children with disabilities teams. Most respondents were not therefore in a position to comment, although several assumed that some progress had been made in recent years in terms of the involvement of both the health service and the LEA. One of the assumptions behind this was that care leavers with *significant* disabilities had a statement of special educational need from the LEA. In contrast, the majority of young people in public care and dealt with by SSDs do not have such a statement, although they may indeed have lesser special educational needs.

Second, work with young people with moderate learning difficulties. Some respondents pointed to the unemployability of these young people; others to the useful voluntary work they sometimes did within leaving care teams on practical tasks and under supervision, but with care needing to be taken to ensure that their benefits were not compromised.

Perhaps of even greater significance are those young people who some time back became disaffected from the education system and may also have been excluded or absented themselves from school. The likelihood is that these are the same young people whom SSDs have difficulty in engaging and *getting alongside*. It was therefore feared that as leaving care teams became better at identifying these young people, the department’s performance on ET&E outcomes for care leavers was likely to plummet.
This, of course, confirms the need for more work to be undertaken at an earlier stage. In many instances, however, these are young people who enter the public care system as teenagers and already have long established patterns of school-related difficulties which may indeed have played a significant part in the breakdown in family relationships and precipitated admission to care (Sinclair et al, 1995). The need to focus on educational and vocational opportunities is, therefore, one which cannot wait to the time of leaving care but which needs to begin even at a pre-care stage. As such it involves not only leaving care teams, but locality social workers and all potential carers of young people: residential homes, foster carers, residential schools, secure units, YOTs, and the probation service. Most importantly, it involves mainstream schools, their ability to identify potential difficulties, and the collaboration they receive from other agencies, such as SSDs, in seeking to address these.

Concluding remarks

This section has examined the steps being taken by SSDs to support care leavers in education, training and employment. This has highlighted that this is an area that has traditionally been neglected, not so much at the leaving care stage but at earlier more significant stages. Clearly, too, when taken in the context of care leavers overall needs, ET&E can be seen as a potential protective factor as young people move to independence. If, on the other hand, they have low educational achievement and poor support, their employability and potential to earn is diminished, which in turn has an effect on their ability to manage financially, and to sustain accommodation. Leaving care teams cannot be expected to overcome past omissions.

A number of potentially useful and interesting initiatives are beginning to emerge, despite some confusion about the implications of certain central government initiatives. These developments are highlighted in the body of the section and not repeated here.

Concern remains about some of these young people who have become disengaged from education prior to their admission to care. A question mark hangs over how some of the new arrangements for care leaving services might impact on this issue: will teams working with all looked after young people from 16 or earlier be able to work alongside these disengaged young people more effectively than has previously been the case? Or indeed is this an issue which suggests that teams should specialise in teenagers, regardless of whether or not they are in care? A number of authorities were certainly giving consideration to the development of multi-agency One Stop Shops where information and advice would be available on a range of issues of significance to young people, although none had as yet succeeded in setting up such an initiative.

As a first port of call, promoted through schools and the Youth Service, this might be a useful development aimed at early intervention. The experience of homelessness agencies in this respect may be of significance. Some of these do not themselves offer accommodation, although they may act as a broker on young people’s behalf. They do, however, offer day care facilities and the opportunity for young people to meet with other young people and exchange experiences.

As one young homeless person put it:
You want to be independent and you want to do it yourself. You know you
can’t, you know you need other people to help you but you can’t admit that. If
people are going to help young people they need to understand them - know
how their minds work - and how to behave with them. It’s as simple as that -
too many social workers just turn young people off - then they don’t get help -
and they can get in deep trouble. You can’t blame social workers - but you
can’t blame young people either. It’s just how things are.
7. Personal support

When young people leave care they do so at a much younger age than most of their counterparts in the general population. This means that they have to deal with a number of difficult transitions in life - managing a home, finding employment, learning to cope financially and building a network of support and friendship - in a relatively brief compressed period of time: what several writers have referred to as accelerated transitions. It is only to be expected that they will face difficulties and have need for a wide range of support. This section looks at some of these issues: at the support care leavers receive/need for coping alone; at information and advice on personal relationships; and at continuing links with family. The section is interspersed with the observations of some, generally older, young people on the care system and their thoughts on desirable changes.

Coping alone

Earlier sections have highlighted that young people often have strong feelings about the extent to which they feel they have to cope alone in relation to a range of issues. Several, for example, referred to the loneliness they feel when they move to living alone, and to the fear and uncertainty they experience when trying to arrange benefit and employment. They tended to speak of this in terms of *being hurtled into the big wide world*.

Several also spoke very honestly of how they realised, with the benefit of hindsight, that they had responded inappropriately to these situations. Some of the most commonly cited examples were continually failing to keep appointments with professionals and providing an open door to other young people, and consequently getting into all sorts of difficulties, including endangering their tenancy. Although there was no direct evidence of it, it also appeared to be at this stage that many young people began to be more seriously involved in the drug scene.

Young people were asked what they thought of the level of support they received from social services in this respect. Table 7.1 summarises their replies.

**Table 7.1 Young people’s perceptions of the amount of information/advice on coping on your own**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Numbers</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loads</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enough</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall, some 51 per cent of young people expressed dissatisfaction with what was available. In saying this, account has to be taken of the fact that these were the views of a range of young people at different stages of the leaving care process. Of the 18 young homeless people, several of whom had been out of the care system for many years, there was almost complete unanimity that they had not received enough support in relation to coping alone. Similarly, young people who were still in care, living with foster carers or in residential care, were much more likely to state that they were receiving loads of advice/information on this topic. Some of this may be attributable to the fact that many leaving care teams do offer life skills modules which cover themes of this nature - young people yet to experience life on their own might therefore be somewhat blasé about the support that was available.

These life skills courses are obviously of value to young people, despite their rather theoretical approach at the point in time at which they are delivered. They also invariably take the form of a group approach, which although it has several benefits, also has some disadvantages. The benefits relate to practical skills in particular: cooking, shopping, decorating and so forth. However, in relation to less tangible skills - coping with loneliness and depression - they appear to have less to offer and, from young people’s perspective, there is a danger that these courses are available at the cost of more individualised support being available at a later stage, when the need for it is really felt.

A number of SSDs were attempting to address this by providing drop-in facilities: non-office accommodation where leisure and laundry facilities were generally available, and sometimes the use of a computer. These drop-in facilities were also said to provide care leavers with a venue where they could meet other young people. Where teams provided this service to a wider group of young people than simply care leavers, the potential contact was even greater and this was much appreciated by young people. Some, for example, did not always want to spend their time with other care leavers.

As one young person put it:

*The drop-in is all very well but not a lot of people go - I mean everybody tends to know something about you - your business - about your background years ago - you don’t always want that. You just want to be you, not your background.*

A repeated theme from young people was that what they wanted was *companionship*. Some SSDs were taking very positive steps in this respect: Providing care leavers with discounted or free membership of a local leisure centre; Introducing a Sunday lunch club; Providing young people with the opportunity of organised outings on bank holidays; Setting up 24 hour telephone help-lines. As well as providing care leavers with the opportunity of meeting other young people, these steps can likewise provide them with the opportunity for more informal contact with adults. Many care leavers appear to want this, as is indicated in the following quotations:

*It would be nice if they just sometimes came around (to the young person’s place of residence) and asked how you were getting on. Nothing special - just to have a chat.*
It’s always you who have to make the move - you have to go to the office - it makes it difficult and they always think there’s something wrong. It would be much better if they phoned and said “Alright if I come round tomorrow - I haven’t heard from you for a while?”

Female, aged Twenty years
In care 7 years, sleeping rough 4 years

What is the most important advice/information a young person leaving care should be given?

1. Benefits.
2. Help to get permanent accommodation.
3. Help to cope: you get used to having decisions made for you, and then you’re out into the big wide world.

What would you do to make a difference for young people if you were in charge of leaving care services?

1. Make sure they have permanent accommodation when they leave care.
2. Get forms sorted, so you can put in for benefits straight away.
3. Life skills, budgeting, how to cope.
4. Make sure there is always someone there for them to talk to.
5. Help if they want to go on to college, FE and career.

Twenty five year old male
In care five years, sleeping rough off/on since 18

What is the most important advice/information a young person leaving care should be give?

1. About cooking.
2. About budgeting
3. About benefits

What would you do to make a difference for young people if you were in charge of leaving care services?

1. A ‘proper’ leaving care project - provide more training and support
2. Provide semi-independent units.
3. Provide after-care workers.
Personal relationships

Section 2 has already shown that information about personal relationships was one of the main topics on which young people indicated they would like more information. This included use of leisure facilities, hobbies and making friendships. But predominantly the demand was for information about intimate personal relationships: safe sex, contraception and STDs. There are clear messages here for health promotion specialists and for sex education as provided by schools and carers, not least because of the high incidence of early pregnancy and parenthood amongst care leavers, and current government initiatives to reduce teenage pregnancy.

As was the case with coping on your own, Table 7.2 shows that a considerable proportion of young people did not feel they had enough information/advice in relation to personal relationships.

Table 7.2 Young people’s perceptions of the amount of information/advice on personal relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numbers</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loads</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enough</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Like many other aspects of the support needed by care leavers, it is debatable whether social workers do, or indeed, should, have the necessary expertise to offer the personal support young people want. It may be more a question of SSDs enlisting the collaboration of other agencies and facilitating young people’s access to the assistance they offer. As Table 7.3 shows SSD staff were not altogether satisfied with the collaboration they received in this respect.

This table does, however, belie the impression often given within interviews that some SSDs had considerable dissatisfactions about the degree of collaboration in practice over these matters. This was particularly the case in relation to a range of services which it was felt statutory health agencies could offer. These included counselling and therapy sessions. Indeed, some departments were exploring the possibility of small voluntary agencies taking on some aspects of this work, given their repeated failure to obtain services from the health service.
Table 7.3 SSD satisfaction with inter-agency collaboration on meeting care leavers’ needs for personal support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite satisfied</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite dissatisfied</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is likely to be a continuing theme at a more acute level. If, as anticipated, SSDs become more able to identify those care leavers whom they have traditionally found difficult to engage, in particular those with mental health needs, they will be looking for more assistance from the health service. At the present time, there appear to be few facilities in London which are in a position to meet the needs of these young people. One national voluntary child care agency does run a service which deals exclusively with care leavers with very high levels of needs - Barnardo’s 16+ project. Otherwise there appear to be only two other facilities in the voluntary sector: one run by a homelessness agency, Centrepoint; the other by another national child care agency, NCH Action for Children.

Meeting cultural needs

Interestingly, it was in this context, too, that three SSD respondents made reference to looking into the possibility of developing contacts with local organisations to support the cultural needs of young people. These were boroughs where there were high percentages of particular minority ethnic groups. Particular reference was made in this context to young Asians, and especially young Asian females. Although these young people were not necessarily care leavers as such, they came to the attention of SSDs and voluntary organisations because of long-standing child protection issues and the need for assistance with accommodation. This was said, on a number of occasions, to have left them isolated from their own cultural communities.

While the response of the above SSDs suggests that there may be some small local organisations which may be able to assist in providing such support, in the course of the Audit & Assessment, we became aware of only one larger organisation working in this area and offering services to a number of boroughs. The Coram Family boys2MEN project described below is a relatively new project which specifically targets young black men in care.
Coram Family
boys2MEN Project

Funded for two years by the Home Office’s Family Support Unit, the project intends to work in partnership with all the London authorities and voluntary organisations that provide services for looked after black young people in or preparing to leave care.

Young black looked after children face many personal and social pitfalls as a result of being in care. Research has consistently shown that young people in care fall considerably below the national average in a wide range of areas that lead to social exclusion. As a consequence, they have fewer life chances and demonstrate an inability to make and sustain lasting relationships.

Black young people in care face additional pressures and barriers as a result of the negative typecasting and institutionalised racism within today’s society. Black men are seen as incapable of being good fathers or partners. This message and portrayal of black men sets up our young men: especially those growing up in care, to fail or in some cases not even try to be different.

The aims of the project are:

1. Tackle the issues associated with the social exclusion of young black men by preparing them for fatherhood, relationships, meaningful careers and social development;

2. Create an effective group-work model using sports, music, drama, video, the expressive arts and experiential group work techniques that can be disseminated nationally;

3. Create a video documentary of the work of the project, for possible future broadcast;

4. Develop positive values and perspectives on life by addressing past experiences and linking these to their present and future aspirations;

5. Explore and challenge the truth and myths associated with negative stereotypes of black men and how these can affect our self-image.

For too long the triple whammy of being black, male and in care has resulted in disaffection, social exclusion, and underachievement. We aim to break this cycle with a specially targeted service to bring young black men in from the margins of society and equip them to compete on a level playing field, maximise their full potential, and enable them to be successful role models.
**Twenty-four year old Afro-Caribbean Male**

**Six years in care, 6 years rough sleeping**

*What is the most important advice/information a young person leaving care should be given?*

1. Give skills to live on your own - eg budgeting, cooking, hygiene, presentation skills.
2. Job skills - education.
3. Set programme throughout being in care.

*What would you do to make a difference for young people if you were in charge of leaving care services?*

1. Provide a social worker up to 21.
2. Provide optional counselling up to age 25.
3. Training/more courses for young people.
4. Option to back out of flat - less pressure - different types of accommodation

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**Family links**

There is well-documented evidence (Millham et al, 1986) that when young people have spent considerable lengths of time in care, their links with their family and neighbourhood weaken. There is also evidence to suggest that as young people prepare to leave care, they tend to wish to renew or repair their relationships with family members (Biehal et al, 1995; Marsh and Peel, 1999). A number of SSD respondents commented on this, stating that family, too, often endeavoured to re-establish links at this stage. For the young person, this could be a trying time when plans were severely disrupted.

As one SSD representative put it:

*I can’t say that it happens in every case but it’s very common for family members to rear their heads at the time of leaving care- even family members who’ve been out of touch for years. It’s very difficult some young people just don’t want to get involved; others get their hopes up. It’s a time when there has to be a lot of emotional re-balancing.*

Despite this, there was very little evidence from the *Audit and Assessment* that working on family links or supporting young people in relation to this issue was a priority for leaving care specialists. Furthermore, only one example was identified by SSDs of a family mediation service in operation. This was a new development, initiated by NCH Action for Children represents part of a wider development of family mediation services in relation to youth homelessness.
Family mediation services have a clear role to play in relation to care leavers as well as to this wider group of young people with accommodation difficulties. The significance of this role lies not so much in reuniting young people with their families in the sense of their living together, but in endeavouring to maintain a mutually acceptable link with the extended family structure, and the wider-ranging support and continuity that this can afford. In the case of care leavers this is, of course, something which is to be borne in mind throughout the care experience, not simply at the point of leaving care.

Young people were asked if they had had support from anyone other than their social worker. Their responses are summarised in Table 7.4.

**Table 7.4 Did young people feel that they had had support from anyone other than SSD**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SSD-accessed young people</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless young people</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A sharp contrast can be seen between those young people who the researchers accessed through SSDs, and who were still in touch with them, and the young homeless people, many of whom had been out of care for some time. When young people were asked to specify from whom they had received this help, some interesting findings emerged. For example, from the 25 SSD-accessed young people, there were two references to other related professionals (an education welfare worker and careers officer), four references to carers, 12 references to friends, and 16 references to family members, including brothers, sisters and grandparents, as well as parents. Homeless young people were much more likely to refer in this context to homelessness agencies, such as London Connection, New Horizons, and the staff of individual hostels, and to friends. Only two made reference to family members, and overall it
was clear that the attempt to rebuild/maintain relationships in this group of young people had been unsuccessful.

---

**Twenty-four year old male**

4 years in care, been in prison, 2 years rough sleeping

*What is the most important advice/information a young person leaving care should be given?*

1. That you are too young to leave at 16.
2. That you need to have some place to go and that you need to be with other young people.
3. That SSD should keep in contact with you.
4. That SSD should give you food, not money - so that you don’t buy drugs.

*What would you do to make a difference for young people if you were in charge of leaving care services?*

1. Make children’s homes smaller so that young people get more attention.
2. Help you to get back/keep in touch with your parents.
3. Give more support with housing and with finance.
4. Point you in right direction to get training.

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**Concluding remarks**

This section has looked at care leavers’ personal support needs and at the services available to meet these. It suggests that a considerably greater emphasis is now being placed by SSDs on ensuring that care leavers have *practical* skills to cope with living outside the care system - cooking, shopping, decorating and so forth. At the same time the responses from young people highlight the great needs they have for personal support in dealing with their past in managing on their own and coping with loneliness.

The findings discussed in this section raise a number of issues relevant to the continued development of leaving care services. These are:

- **Continuity**

  Leaving care represents not only a series of accelerated transitions, but a time when existing links - however tenuous - can be abruptly discontinued. School contacts, carers and other neighbourhood ties change and the opportunities to maintain contact may be limited. These factors need to be taken into account in preparing young people to leave care, not simply in terms of assessing their readiness to leave care but by
facilitating the continuity, albeit on a reduced basis, of existing supports and ensuring the development of new personal support networks.

As the corporate parents of looked after young people, local authorities have a lead role to play in enabling young people to take advantage of opportunities but of also allowing them to make choices. This is challenging work for any parent; for corporate parents it has additional challenges: it may mean providing the resources to enable young people to remain in communities where they already have contacts; allowing them to remain longer with or to return to foster carers; exploring the potential for contact with different family members, and maintaining contact with young people. As corporate parents, local authorities have a role in assisting young people move into close personal relationships, supporting them through the ups and downs of these and providing them with the necessary information to make safe and informed choices. The continued development of leaving care and after care services needs to have at its centre the principle of providing a core of community for young care leavers.

- Keeping personal support on the agenda

With the number of central government initiatives focusing on the education and employment of young people, and the understandable emphasis on accommodation as young people approach leaving care, it can be easy to lose sight of care leavers personal support needs. As this section has shown, young people may not recognise these themselves at the time of leaving care but having left care they invariably see there unmet needs in this respect as being of critical significance. Arguably, too, this is an area in which SSDs through the professional training of their social work staff has an expertise to offer.

Current developments such as the increasing mix of staff backgrounds and training within leaving care teams, the forthcoming requirement to proactively maintain contact with care leavers, and to do so over a longer period present fresh opportunities to ensure that personal support is firmly on the practice agenda for care leavers.

- Inter-agency collaboration

The section also raised the wider issue of inter-agency collaboration. Two related matters emerged. The first arose in relation to what were often described as the more vulnerable groups - and more difficult for the SSDs to engage with: those described as having mental health problems such as drug abuse and offending behaviour, and those with borderline moderate learning difficulties. There are clear implications here for the need for an improved collaboration between SSDs and parts of the health service, as well as with adult service providers.

It is important for local authorities, as the parents of care leavers, to acknowledge that young people may have already or may yet make mistakes, and offer them appropriate support through such periods. Here a second issue of inter-agency collaboration arises, in this instance between the local authority/SSD and voluntary sector agencies to whom they contract out services. Both SSDs and voluntary agencies commented on
contracting out being an increasing trend. There appears to be some potential dangers in this development. Several voluntary agencies recounted, how having been contracted to give a service on the behalf of the SSD, the SSD then appeared to consider it had discharged all its responsibilities in this respect. It would be regrettable if one of the outcomes of contracting out was that the SSD saw this as adequate discharge of their responsibilities.

As the representative of one voluntary agency put it:

*Leaving care is a process - a long process - which SSDs are notoriously bad at managing. I’m glad this is being given more priority but it also worries me. All the problems and difficulties are now being highlighted again and what SSDs are doing is looking to the voluntary sector to provide projects that deal with this, that and the next thing. They are quite happy to think that somebody else is dealing with it – that’s them discharging their responsibility - they don’t want to know beyond that. And what do we do? - we take it on, we struggle to deal with all the mistakes they’ve made. I’m not convinced that this really is change, that this really is addressing the issues.*
8. Overview & Implications

The purpose of the Audit and Assessment was to paint a broad picture of leaving care services in London. Earlier sections of this report have addressed this main aim. In this final section, attention is given to the broader issues raised and to their implications. As repeated references to previous research indicate, the issues the report raises will not come as a surprise to those working with care leavers. What does differ, however, is the context in which the research was undertaken and the range of topics that have been covered together.

The current climate is one in which services to children and young people in general are being given considerably more priority in national policy. This is evidenced in a number of different initiatives to prevent the social exclusion of young people and the availability of a range of funding, including the Quality Protects Special Grant, to tackle problems long recognised by those working with young people. In the case of care leavers, it has also led to imminent new legislation, which will change the duties and powers of local authorities, who have corporate responsibility for children and young people in care. The present time therefore presents an almost unprecedented opportunity to take stock and inform the process of change.

In introducing this section, it is also important to acknowledge that the Audit and Assessment is based on what is happening in the London boroughs. The London boroughs do, of course, differ from the rest of the country in a number of significant ways but more by degree, than in actual substance. The main messages and the implications of the project findings apply as much to unitary authorities, metropolitan boroughs and counties, as they do to London boroughs.

This section takes the following form: first, there is a brief re-statement of the messages of this and previous research. Then some new issues are raised. Finally, the section concludes by considering what implications these have for those delivering leaving care services, for local authorities more generally, and for central government departments.

Well established and new research messages

The report began by drawing attention to the main messages from existing research. These were:

- The range of problems faced by young people leaving care cannot be divorced from the quality of their pre-care and in-care experiences;

- Care leavers are not a homogeneous group in terms of pre-care experiences, case histories, needs and abilities, or their cultural and ethnic backgrounds;

- Young people leaving care are likely to have undergone a weakening of links with family, friends and neighbourhood and, as a result, may experience isolation, loneliness, and a confusion of identity;
• Care leavers tend to have records of poor educational achievement and many leave care with no job and poor employment prospects;

• The services available to young people leaving care and the preparation they receive for this is highly variable;

• Young people leave care to live independently at a much earlier age than young people who are not in care.

Revisiting the well-established

These messages are, of course, not discrete but inter-related and overlapping. As such, they indicate that a comprehensive joined-up approach is needed if significant change is to be effected. To what extent has that been found in this Audit and Assessment of services in London?

The first main messages of the Audit and Assessment is that London boroughs are starting to make considerable progress in taking account of most of these issues. There is evidence of significant recent and planned changes which should impact positively and lead to a needs-based service for care leavers. This can be seen in several ways:

• Many authorities are involved in a re-organisation of the leaving care services; various models have been adopted, perhaps the most common being the ‘dual system’ where specialist staff work directly with care leavers while locality social workers still hold case responsibility;

• There is much evidence of SSDs, often in partnership with others, working to develop a wider range of new services, especially accommodation and support services;

• Some interagency collaborations are working well and getting better, for example with housing agencies, but better links are needed with education especially over financial support and more particularly with health regarding mental health services;

• Information on care leavers is still unreliable and inconsistent; this is a major deficit. But there are signs of new investment in information systems which should improve this for the future;

• SSDs were able to provide examples of ways in which they had begun to consult with young people, though few had developed coherent strategies for this; the mechanisms for giving feedback to young people where unclear, leaving some wondering if consultations were effective in bringing about change.

This Audit and Assessment would characteristise leaving care services in London as in a process of change with a sense of moving forward – the progress and nature of that change is variable across the authorities, and all would acknowledge there is still much to be done.
Despite this overall positive picture, there are a number of cautionary notes. First, a continuing concern remains over whether necessary account is always being taken of the in-care experience. It was beyond the scope of the Audit and Assessment to examine this issue but repeatedly attention was drawn to the importance of addressing certain needs well in advance of the stage of preparing to leave care.

Secondly, the Audit and Assessment has highlighted that a significant number of care leavers may have been slipping through the net of leaving care services. This applies to several groups:

- Those young people who have become disaffected from society generally and whom SSDs tended to characterise as those with mental health problems, who abuse drugs and offend. These same young people were those whom SSDs found most difficult to engage in care, often because the young people wanted nothing whatsoever to do with social workers. Their reluctance to accept support at an earlier stage invariably means that the support was not always available, or not available in the appropriate form, at a later point in time when these young people were more likely to recognise their own needs.

- There is some evidence that such young people may cease to be looked after, either deliberately or by default, at an inappropriately young age. Finding a way of engaging these looked after young people and intervening in such a way that their difficulties do not escalate and become more complex presents real challenges for social workers and all other professionals who have responsibilities in relation to them.

- A second group, which at risk of slipping through the net of leaving care services are these young people who are placed by SSD outside the local authority area. This may be a particular issue for London boroughs who frequently have to place children and young people in locations well beyond their own boundaries. Current proposals clarify the issue of responsibility for these young people when they leave care but issues remain over the practice of some authorities which means that support, particularly in the form of accommodation, tends to be made available back in the originating borough. Such a practice means that a significant number of young people are uprooted from their established networks of support, or, conversely, remain in the area with which they are familiar but are largely denied access to other aspects of leaving care services. At a minimum, there is a clear need to improve tracking and monitoring of the progress of such young people with a view to assessing current and planning future arrangements.

- A further group at particular risk of slipping through the net of leaving care services are those with disabilities. As was stated at the outset these young people tend to be dealt with by specialist Children with Disabilities Teams and were therefore largely precluded from the current Audit and Assessment, given its timescale. However, the links between these teams and specialist leaving care teams appeared at best to be tenuous. Furthermore, there was evidence that there were severe gaps in the linkages between those services that deal with looked after young people with moderate or borderline moderate learning difficulties ands adult disability teams.
An emerging group of care leavers within London boroughs are asylum seekers. These young people have very particular needs, not only in respect of culture and ethnicity but in dealing with past trauma. The ability of SSDs to meet these needs was hampered by poor information and a lack of multi-agency assessment process.

Thirdly, another established research message reinforced by the Audit and Assessment is that care leavers are not a homogenous group. Some, for example, have spent many years in the care system, and are well settled with the same carers; others may have spent similarly long periods in care but have been less settled and experienced a number of placement changes, and others will not have entered care until adolescence.

By the same token, there are often few differences between the needs and likely outcomes for care leavers and some other vulnerable young people who have no experience of care. As has been raised at various stages in the main body of the report, it can be a matter of chance - especially in so far as “teenagers in need” are concerned, whether one is or is not admitted to care. In addition, whilst research has shown that a high percentage of young homeless people have spent periods of time - sometimes not inconsiderable periods - in public care, the differences in the personal and family circumstances of those homeless young people who have and those who have not been looked after are fairly minimal. If, then, we are to address properly the issue of young people’s social exclusion, we must consider the needs of those whose contact with SSDs may have been more limited.

New messages

A special feature of the Audit & Assessment was its focus on accommodation. In this respect, it has highlighted the degree to which most London SSDs are now developing a range of accommodation options, with differing levels of support. Further research is urgently required in this area to monitor how different groups of young people respond to different types of accommodation, and their progress, or otherwise, through the different levels. Only in this way, will it be possible to know what works best in practice, and develop services accordingly.

The project has also highlighted safety issues in relation to accommodation. It has, for example, shown that homeless care leavers, have great concerns about their safety in hostel accommodation, their personal safety and exposure to drugs. These can represent a real barrier to the placing of young people into hostels and need to be addressed if wider social inclusion agendas are to be realised.

The Audit and Assessment has also highlighted issues regarding the approval and vetting of staff outside the SSD, who are working directly with young people. It has pointed to the anomalous situation whereby young people moving from care to supported accommodation are, in effect, moving from one of the most rigorously regulated forms of care to one which is entirely unregulated. Given the lessons of the past in relation to both residential and foster care, this is an area which needs to be addressed with some urgency.
Implications for leaving care and after care services

For those managing and delivering leaving care services, there are two main sets of implications: the way in which care services are organised and the professional background of staff delivering leaving and after care services.

The organisation of leaving care services.

The evidence of this project is that there is currently much experimentation in this respect. For the most part, however, departments are continuing to operate what has been described as a dual system, with specialists (usual not trained social workers) working directly with young people while a social worker continues to hold case responsibility. Many are taking steps to introduce leaving care specialists at an earlier stage. In the ongoing monitoring of arrangements, managers of all SSD children and young people’s services may therefore wish to bear in mind the following questions: To what degree is our leaving care service providing a seamless service of continuity of care experience and preparation for independence? What services are available for vulnerable ‘young people in need’ and how are these delivered?

A second issue arises over the appropriateness of the professional background of the staff employed to deliver leaving and after care services. To what degree, is it necessary for the major staff complement to be professionally qualified social workers? What might be the role of those with youth work qualifications and those with specialist backgrounds in, for example, teaching and the careers service? What additional, in-service, child care/youth work training do these staff require? What checks need to be made on the background of these and other staff appointed to work with young people in semi- and independent accommodation? What types of staff are best suited to managing such mixed groups of staff, whilst simultaneously making the appropriate links and partnerships with other related agencies?

Implications for local authorities

A corporate approach

As has been frequently pointed out on previous occasions, it is the local authority - not only the SSD - which has corporate responsibility for looked after children and young people. Whilst the Audit and Assessment has suggested that considerable improvement has been, and continues to be, made on cross departmental collaboration, especially with housing agencies, it is equally clear that more progress is needed. This is true, at both practitioner and more strategic levels across the LEA, social services and housing departments. While individual departments have a responsibility for working on this at the practitioner level, authorities might like to consider how this matter can best be carried forward at the strategic level. Clearly, too, this is an issue which has implications not only in relation to care leavers but to other vulnerable young people as can be seen in the government’s proposals for corporate duties for tackling homelessness.
**Better links with health**

Secondly, this project has highlighted missing linkages between SSDs and the health service, in particular over issues of child and adolescent mental health. These missing linkages are evident in two main respects: first in relation to child and adolescent mental health services themselves, and secondly, in relation to the transition between these services and those for adults. Once more, this is not a new message but it is one which is thrown into sharp relief in the case of care leavers and other vulnerable young people. Furthermore it applies not only to SSDs but to housing departments and LEAs too. Young people with what can be broadly described as mental health problems can pose difficulties for schools and LEAs, just as they can also become the problem tenants of housing departments.

**Inter-borough approaches**

The *Audit and Assessment* therefore raises questions about how local authorities, as corporate entities, might address this issue. Insofar as London boroughs are concerned, there would certainly appear to be opportunities not only for a whole borough approach, but for cross borough approaches.

Another area to where an inter-borough approach might be applicable is that of accommodation. Care leavers and young people more generally do not relate to local authority administrative boundaries but to districts which often stride these boundaries. Likewise, the relatively small number of care leavers at any given time from some London boroughs is such that it is not practical to have arrangements for a wide range of semi-independent or supported accommodation. There would appear to be much unexplored potential for neighbouring boroughs to work collaboratively in these respects. The Government’s proposals for the *Supporting People* programme could provide a useful template for such arrangements.

**Implications for central government**

The *Audit and Assessment* has also raised a number of issues which extend beyond the domain of individual departments and authorities, and require the attention of central government.

- The actual or potential loophole with respect to the arrangement for the approval and vetting of staff, from departments other than SSD, who are working directly with young people in supported accommodation situations

- Linked to this are issues regarding *standards and their inspection*, and staffing and appropriate training. Proposals within the current Care Standards Bill are intended to establish new frameworks to address these issues. A number of matters raised within the *Audit and Assessment* are of direct relevance to these proposals. Notably, these include standards of preparation and after care; the registration and inspection of a range of residential and non-residential accommodation including supported lodgings, private children’s homes, direct access hostels, and semi-independent
accommodation; and the range of appropriate minimum qualifications and training of those working in such environments

- The need for SSD to be supported in their investment in new more robust management information systems

- The number and range of initiatives recently announced in relation to care leavers and vulnerable youth more generally. This appears to be indicative of a wider issue where there are now so many initiatives, that difficulty is frequently encountered in putting them all together at a local level and considering their joint implications for practice, service delivery and resources. Joined-up guidelines to these initiatives would prove very helpful in ensuring their speedy and effective implementation.

- Although the focus of the Audit and Assessment was care leavers, it has drawn attention to two facets of youth homelessness: that although care leavers are widely represented within the youth homelessness population, there are few differences between homeless care leavers and other homeless young people who have not been in care. Although it is clearly important to target particular vulnerable groups, one of the downsides of this is that those outside the group may be left out. With a range of initiatives focusing on specific groups such as care leavers, there is a danger that one excludes other vulnerable groups - and hence perpetuate or even introduce inequities. It is to be hoped that this does not occur with the youth homelessness issue where attention needs to be focused equally on those who have and those who have not experience of the care system.

Finally, notwithstanding the need for individual teams, departments and authorities to monitor the many changes which are currently occurring within the fields of leaving and after care and preventing the social exclusion of young people, there is considerable scope for more detailed evaluation across different types of arrangements and departments, and of the contribution of the private and voluntary sectors. Moreover, it will be important to evaluate the impact of these various initiatives on care leavers and other vulnerable groups and to track the progress of particular samples. It is to be hoped that having set the scene for the introduction of these changes, central government departments will likewise assist in their longer-term delivery by commissioning research to explore what works best in practice.
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