

Cross-Party Group on Care Leavers

Thurs 16th March 2023, 6pm – 7.30pm

Minutes

Present

MSPs

Paul O’Kane

Paul McLennan

Invited guests

Sue Hammersley – Director National House Project

Non-MSP Group Members

Martin Canavan, Head of Policy, Aberlour Child Care Trust

Jo Derick – CEO, Staf

Julia Donnelly, Head of Representation, Clan Childlaw

Kirsty-Louise Hunt, Senior Policy and Public Affairs Lead, Barnardo’s Scotland

Louise Hunter, CEO Who Cares? Scotland

Coral McIntosh, CEO Elpis Trust

Martin Canavan, Head of Policy, Aberlour Child Care Trust

Aimee Thorpe

Sam Upton, President Care Experienced Society, Strathclyde University

Marion Willshaw – Senior Digital Communications Officer, Staf

Apologies

Jeannette Miller

Agenda item 1

Welcome from Paul O’Kane: Minutes from previous meeting

Review of Minutes from previous meeting - Minutes approved

Outstanding Actions – to improve collaboration between parliamentary committees. PO will write to the committees to move this forward and report back at the next meeting.

Agenda item 2

Housing policy for care leavers: how is it being experienced by CPG members?

PO invited JD to open the floor on this item.

JD asked if anyone would like to contribute on this item?

Coral stated housing stock and lack of appropriate accommodation is having an impact on young people in terms of transitioning. Coral has several young people who are leaving their care arrangements and are not able to move onto supported accommodation. Another issue is the dis-incentivisation of employment brought about by the reduction in housing benefit once employed, which in turn influences the holistic benefits of being employed.

PO asked if those present were also experiencing this, or any other issues?

Julia highlighted the lack of housing stock and the effect this has on young people transitioning from care into living independently, and questioned the point of creating entitlements when the entitlements are not available. Julia recognised that resources differ geographically, but pointed out that this is not an isolated problem.

PO recognised this situation such as the lack of suitable housing and being trapped in supported housing from his previous roles.

Sue Hammersley, Director at The National House Project agrees with Julia that housing stock is a problem, and pointed out that the pull on this housing stock is huge. Sue also highlighted the narrative that young people leaving care will be poor tenants, which is not the case. The National House Project has worked closely with housing providers to change this stigmatising narrative around care leavers, as young people who are well supported are good tenants. This encourages Housing providers to offer more houses to young people leaving care,

Sam informed the group that another difficulty for care leavers is the request for, and ability to obtain a guarantor. This has an impact on obtaining a tenancy for a private landlord and may result in the young person having to pay rent in advance which is not feasible.

Martin in replying to Sam's comments believes this also brings to the fore the challenges faced by care experienced young people and the systematic discriminatory issues around credit, loans, and bank accounts. Everyone should reflect on this and think about how we need to change and influence the experience of the care community.

Martin believes a guarantor should be available to secure quality housing as young people move into independent living, and that the members should amplify this issue within their workspaces.

PM stated that the overarching principles of the CPG are important in terms of the approach the CPG takes with the new government ministers and new first Minister.

Julia stated that in relation to guarantors, if a young person is entitled to aftercare, then the local authority has a duty to consider all eligible needs of that young person and if that need is for the young person to have a guarantor, the Local authority should help to solve how that need will be met. Aftercare rights tend not to be fully utilised, therefore specific information relating to guarantors should be given in conjunction with information about eligibility and rights.

PO suggested that this would be a good opportunity to explore the topic more broadly and asked if Julia and Sam could have a further discussion and feed back to the CPG at a future meeting.

PM asked how homelessness and local government duties can be imbedded into local community plans? PM accepted that the housing solution will be different geographically but felt if the provision of a guarantor is not an obligation of local plans, then it will not be discussed, therefore it needs to be imbedded to become part of the wider community planning.

PO agreed that these were important reflections of the role local government and community planning partnership have in this, and in recognising the rights of care experienced people in terms of throughcare and aftercare.

No further contributions were given in relation to this item.

Agenda item 3

Staf Summit: Housing policy and practice action points resulting from Staf Summit

JD and MW presented the LHP film 'Cinderella' and the Home and belonging evaluation that children in Scotland and Staf carried out,

JD thanked those who were present and took part in presenting and sharing their knowledge at the Staf Summit on the 8th of March. The summit attendees were asked to reflect on what they had heard, shared, and learned on the day, and to prioritise what they thought were the most urgent and most important recommendation for Staf to take forward.

Urgent recommendations:

1. To take steps to ensure appropriate housing stock is available across all areas of the country.
2. Increase the pace of action to meet the recommendation contained within The Promise and consider how the learning from Home and Belonging can support this.

3. Ensure that a trauma informed relationship based approach is available for young people with experience of care as they move into their first home.
4. Ensure there is a diverse range of housing options within the local authority.

Important recommendations:

1. To evaluate options to increase the income and financial security of young people with care experience. This should include considering the value of a guaranteed income for care leavers and mechanisms to implement this.
2. Develop collaborative approaches across the local authority including ensuring close working practices in local authority departments, particularly between social work and housing department.
3. Develop close relationships between third sector providers and throughcare and aftercare teams to ensure appropriate support for young people as they transition from care.

For Practitioners

Urgent recommendations:

1. Develop knowledge and understanding of housing options and support locally. Discuss these with young people with experience of care as they approach the stage of moving to their first home.
2. Develop trauma informed approach, including embedding this in support and supervision for staff and ensure they have appropriate training and knowledge.

Important recommendations:

1. To imbed relationship-based practice in your work by ensuring appropriate CPD opportunities are available.
2. Ensure the service delivery model embeds relationship based approaches by offering longer term contracts.

Attendees also made and took way pledges.

JD informed those present that she happy to share Staf's commitments from the summit outwith the meeting, and opened the discussion to anyone present who attended the summit for comment.

No other contributions were made.

JD opened the floor to questions.

Louise asked what The Promise Scotland view was on ending homelessness for young people, and if there was any evidence of work being carried out in relation to this?

JD informed Louise that Fraser McKinlay the CEO of The Promise Scotland attended and presented at the summit. JD will have a meeting with Fraser to look at the themes which have arisen. JD will follow up with Louise after her meeting with Fraser.

Julie believes that there should be no cut off point for support, similar to the way a family would provide support, and should be the default practice.

Louise provided an overview of the young person's experience, and the difficulty of moving between unfamiliar support services, rather than someone who is familiar to you and that you already have a relationship with.

Julia stated that moving between different services is not supposed to happen stating that care and housing should not be looked at separately.

PM, on Julia's point suggested writing an action plan and taking these points to COSLA if all were in agreement ?

JD is happy to support this and felt it would be beneficial to create a short life working group to look at these key issues. JD suggested asking a local authority to allow the group to test access rights and highlight barriers. If anyone is interested in joining a short life working group, please let Staf know.

Kirsty thanked JD for her presentation and the summary of the home and belonging initiative. Kirsty felt that this showed the pockets of good practice but also highlighted the gaps in making this available throughout Scotland and would be happy to provide backing for this.

JD asked Amy if there was anything that resonated with her from any the projects? Amy informed the meeting that it was the Peer Mentorship Initiative at Queen Margaret University which she found interesting. Students were paired with a care experienced young person which encouraged friendships and helped with independent living.

PO thanked Amy for her contribution. No other contributions were given.

Agenda item 4

Next steps: Action points to be taken forward by group/MSPs

Julia and Sam to have a further discussion around the right to a Guarantor and feed back to the CPG at a future meeting.

The Promise: Once government changes have taken place, it would be useful to invite the appropriate government minister and Fraser McKinlay to the CPG to raise the points made at this meeting, and to provide us with an update on the progress of The Promise, and the government's long term commitment.

In relation to PM's suggestion of reaching out to COSLA for verification of practices relating to rights, PO, PM, and Staf will conduct the initial meeting and bring information back to the group. All agreed on this.

Agenda item 5

Next meeting: Education – what areas would members like to look at? What topic(s) would you like to discuss at future meetings?

PO asked apart from Education, what other areas would the group like to discuss?

JD informed the group that some of the themes around education and training have been discussed at the Care Leavers into Education (CLiE) and Training forum, such as the stigma in aspects of education.

Beccy suggested poverty and austerity, as this is also linked to education and in preventing access to opportunities.

Julia seconded this suggestion, particularly issues in relation to the cost of living crisis.

PO stated it was important then to find the space for these topics at the next meeting. If any other topics are brought to anyone's attention before the next meeting, please raise them with Staf or PO.

MW raised the issue of no bursaries being available for Post Grad level of study.

PO will bring all of these topics into the discussion which will bring employability into the discussion also.

AOB

JD informed the group that Staf have been invited to take part in the festival of politics in August. Staf are not taking part but are happy to facilitate attendance for those who wish to do so.

PO added that the presiding officer is keen to ensure the festival is accessible to all.

PO thanked all for their attendance today and closed the meeting.