

item:	7
report:	CYP35/08

SWEET 16: THE AGE OF LEAVING CARE IN SCOTLAND

By Linda MacLennan

Summary

In March 2008, a report from Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People '**Sweet 16? The Age of Leaving Care in Scotland**' was laid before the Scottish Parliament. There were 23 main recommendations (included in Appendix 1). There were also 21 specific issues identified for Highland's Integrated Children's Services, along with responses from Highland (Appendix 2).

This report is a response to the recommendations, as well as an update about areas of ongoing development.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The 'Sweet 16' report addressed the concerns of Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People', that local authorities require looked after children to leave care settings at too early an age. The full report is available at www.sccyp.org.uk, and the Executive Summary is provided as Appendix 1.
- 1.2 The Children's Commissioner states in the 'foreword' to the report that:

"I was shocked to learn that young people were still expected to leave care at 16. I wanted to find out why this was happening. This report explores the reasons for this and makes recommendations aimed at moving things on towards what everyone says they want – a system that supports young people until they are ready for a step towards independence, manages a staged route into independence, and continues to support them even after that."

- 1.3 The report acknowledges that "it was not possible to follow up every issue or every area" in detail, but two authorities, including Highland, were given more extensive consideration. The Commissioner states:

"The areas chosen should not be taken as an indication that they are at the bottom of the league in terms of aftercare. The fact that workers were vocal about the rights of young people might be an indication of their special commitment. Some of the issues we explore in these two areas were also highlighted in other parts of Scotland. It may be that the geography of these areas and the associated costs of providing specialised services were a contributory factor to the difficulties reported to us."

1.4 The report's recommendations aim to:

- Encourage strong action to change the culture that assumes 16 as the age for leaving care;
- Ensure workers are trained and informed about young people's rights and are able to pass this information to young people;
- Increase awareness of the reasons why young people leave care early so these can be tackled;
- Encourage the provision of more semi-independent living units;
- Prohibit the use of bed and breakfast establishments and homeless hostels as accommodation for care leavers;
- Help local authorities to fulfil their obligation to care leavers by requiring Registered Social Landlords to co-operate with them;
- Encourage elected members of local authorities to enquire into leaving care arrangements as part of their corporate parenting role;
- Remove barriers to young people returning to their former place of care for overnight stays;
- Ensure that additional statistics are gathered to help monitor what is happening;
- Encourage the Scottish Government to consider amending the legal threshold for aftercare.

3. Background

3.1 There are presently 79 young people being supported by Highland's Throughcare and Aftercare services. 71 of these young people have allocated Lead Professionals in Barnardos Springboard. Seven have Lead Professionals in the Social Work Service, and 1 has a Lead Professional in the Calman Trust.

3.2 Of the 7 young people supported by the Social Work Service, 5 remain in residential care and are being prepared for independent living jointly by a core group of professionals including unit staff, Social Workers and Barnardos Springboard.

3.3 67 of the young people have Child's Plans or Pathways Plans in place, and the Pathways Plans are in the process of being converted into the Child's Plan in line with Getting it Right for Every Child and the My World assessment and planning format. The remaining 12 young people have chosen not to participate in the planning process but continue to have contact with services.

3.4 The age breakdown for these young people is:

15 year olds: 2
16 year olds: 18
17 year olds: 17
18 year olds: 13
19 year olds: 15
20 year olds: 6
21 years + : 8

- 3.5 11 young people are receiving disability living allowance and support and further financial assistance from the Throughcare and Aftercare service. These young people are excluded from the Throughcare and Aftercare legislation, but Highland Council agreed they should be included if this meant we could improve their outcomes and support them to remain in their care setting.
- 3.6 34 of the young people are in receipt of regular financial support from Through and Aftercare Services in relation to living allowance and accommodation.
- 3.7 These various funding arrangements for care leavers are due to be considered further by the Housing & Social Work Committee.

4. Educational and Employment Outcomes

- 4.1 There are 31 young people in Further Education or training, 16 whom are currently studying at college or university on a full time basis.
- 4.2 7 young people are in employment, 7 are actively seeking employment and 22 are currently unemployed. Although we have an indication of the educational and employment status of the 12 remaining young people, this cannot be verified as they are not participating in the planning process.
- 4.3 Lead Professionals where appropriate work actively with young people to encourage them into further education or employment. Some young people are not in a position to work due to pressing personal issues such as substance misuse and mental health problems. Also, 4 are young parents.
- 4.4 Careers Scotland are part of the interagency core group around young people and are actively working with services and young people at an individual and strategic level to improve outcomes. The Education, Culture & Sport Service and partner agencies are implementing the 16+ agenda from the Scottish Government. As part of this, Barnardos are in the process of developing the Youth Build Service in Highland. This is now fully staffed and employers have been identified. This service provides the training and support for young people to gain and sustain employment and the possibility of a permanent post at the end of the programme.
- 4.5 As part of the self evaluation and quality assurance of services and consultation with young people we are evaluating this area in order to identify further developments and improve outcomes for young people.

5. Accommodation settings

- 5.1 Young people live in different types of accommodation and are classified as follows:

Supported accommodation	5
Lodgings	4
Bed and Breakfast	10
Own tenancy	18
Residential Unit	4
Hostel	2
Foster Carer/Supportive Lodgings	5
Friends/relative	11

Family	4
Residential school	3
Kinship carer/Supportive Lodgings	1
House share	2
Halls University	4
Private Tenancy	6

6. Moving Things On....

Highland's response to the report addresses the aims as set out above.

6.1 Encourage strong action to change the culture that assumes 16 as the age for leaving care

Legislation currently in place only permits most young people to remain Looked After until they are 18 years of age. Throughcare and Aftercare legislation in relation to finance ends when a young person is 18. Advice and guidance is provided until they are 21.

Highland Council is clear that it does not have an expectation of young people leaving care at the age of 16. The average age currently of young people leaving care in Highland is 17.2 years.

It is recognised that some young people still choose to leave care at 16, but this is actively discouraged by professionals around the young person. Towards this objective, financial support for young people leaving care, who are moving to supportive housing provision, has been extended to 19 years of age, with rent and living expenses being met by the Throughcare and Aftercare Service. This allows the young person time in a supportive environment to develop skills to manage their own tenancy if they choose to remain Looked After until they are 18.

When appropriate, we have funded young people to remain with their previous foster carers beyond their 18th birthday by using a supportive lodgings approval to enable them to remain there. This is not possible or appropriate for all young people due to Fostering regulations and is assessed on an individual basis.

If the Young Person remains or returns to full time education before the age of 21 we assist with funding for accommodation, living and study expenses. There is discretion to extend up to their 25th birthday to ensure they can be supported to continue their defined course of study.

Under the terms of the homeless legislation The Highland Council Homeless Policy extends the priority need category for this group of young people to under 25 year olds if they have been homeless at any time during their life.

6.2 Increase awareness of the reasons why young people leave care early so these can be tackled

The Integrated Children's Services Quality Assurance Group is in the process of consulting with young people and professionals about all areas of service in relation to this group of young people. Questionnaires' have been developed in

line with children's services quality indicators and the National Throughcare and Aftercare Forum guidance on "How Good is Your Throughcare and Aftercare Service". The recommendations for this self evaluation task will inform further developments and identify an agenda for action tasks and improvement outcomes as part of For Highlands children planning.

6.3 Ensure workers are trained and informed about young people's rights and are able to pass this information to young people

Highland has had a specialist approach to throughcare and aftercare services for a number of years, to ensure that practice is informed by policy in this area, taking account of up to date and evidenced based research.

There is still though, considerable debate across Scotland in relation to some aspects of Throughcare and Aftercare practice. The Throughcare and Aftercare Forum circulates the issues identified by authorities, collates the responses and issues options to authorities. As each issue is clarified and agreed we are able to be clearer with professionals and young people.

There has been considerable training for professionals and carers across Highland on an inter and single agency basis. There is a necessity to roll this training out again to ensure that all current changes and adjustments to roles and responsibilities are highlighted across the area.

6.4 Prohibit the use of bed and breakfast establishments and homeless hostels as accommodation for care leavers

As will be seen from the figures above we have not been able to eliminate the use of bed and breakfast and hostel accommodation. Where emergency accommodation is required this is often the only option available at present. There are a number of new alternative accommodation options being introduced to reduce the reliance on this type of accommodation, and these are detailed below. In terms of providing temporary accommodation, staff should consider the suitability of available accommodation depending on individual circumstances and needs. Not all bed and breakfast or hostel accommodation is necessarily a poor option for all individuals. In some circumstances this is the most appropriate accommodation where support can be provided at the times it is needed. Further work is being undertaken to monitor and review the use of this type of accommodation, and to measure trends in its use.

6.5 Help local authorities to fulfil their obligation to care leavers by requiring Registered Social Landlords to co-operate with them

The Council and main Housing Associations have now introduced a common housing register, along with a common allocation policy. This will provide equal access for young people to all Council and housing association vacancies. Positive relationships are in place with a number of associations over the provision of temporary housing and in addition the Council has a legal right to refer any individual homeless person to a housing association for housing.

Children's Services, Barnardos and Housing & Property Services are working together to further address issues for care leavers. The first draft of a Housing Protocol has been produced. This Protocol highlights the expectations and legal requirements for this client group.

6.6 Encourage the provision of more semi-independent living units

Alongside the protocol mentioned above we have begun addressing additional accommodation provision as follows.

There are two new schemes being developed in Highland that can provide a high level of support and semi-independent living that specifically target this client group:

- Highland Homeless Trust in partnership with Integrated Children's Service has developed a seven bedded supported accommodation unit in Inverness (Planefield House). This unit will provide intensive needs led support to young people to assist in the preparation for independent living. There are currently two young people living in the unit with five waiting to be accommodated once the HMO licence has been approved.
- Barnardos Springboard is in the process of developing a supportive lodgings scheme. There is a full time worker in place and assessments of providers will begin in the very near future following the development of policy, procedures and protocols. Providers will be recruited across the Highland area.

Within the protocol there is commitment from Housing & Property Services to make available accommodation that can be used to promote and develop skills to aid independent living. Negotiations with local housing associations will also take place in relation to the provision of semi-independent living units as move on accommodation from both supportive accommodation provisions. These units would be used to complete the assessment and training for young people before being allocated their own tenancy.

It is clearly recognised that this is only the beginning of the provision required and that we have a legal obligation to provide a varied range of accommodation to meet the needs of this client group.

Some of the ideas that are being investigated include:

- Accommodation units in close proximity to the children's residential units in Highland. These units would have a dual purpose as semi-independence training units to enable young people from within the units to develop independence skills and semi-supported accommodation for a young person who has completed this training until a permanent tenancy can be identified.
- Semi – supported shared tenancy provision – some young people do not want to live on their own but still require the security of their own accommodation.

- Accommodation with high level support. – There are some young people who are not able to sustain accommodation in any setting and may have been removed from various provisions. There is currently no available provision in Highland to address this need.

Housing & Property Services is also looking at the current Highland Housing Register Allocations Policy in relation to this client group. Young people currently have to complete a homeless application to ensure their housing points are maximised. It is accepted that this process is not appropriate for this group of young people. Other options are being investigated and will be reviewed during a planned review of the policy early in 2009.

6.7 Encourage elected members of local authorities to enquire into leaving care arrangements as part of their corporate parenting role;

There will be regular reports and updates on progress of the provision of service to elected members and committees. Elected members will also be invited to the training events should they wish to gain further knowledge of the legislation in relation to this client group.

6.8 Remove barriers to young people returning to their former place of care for overnight stays;

In the absence of dedicated visitor accommodation in our residential childcare units it is difficult to imagine how we could fully commit to this recommendation. Given the demand for placements, it is unlikely that we can maintain any vacancy for more than a few days after a young person is discharged.

Within our establishments though, staff do strive to create a welcoming culture where former residents are encouraged to maintain contact with significant figures in their lives by visiting the units, coming for meals etc. There are some young people who prefer to maintain contact by telephone which is often the only viable option given the geography of the Council and the fact that they may have been placed in a residential unit some distance from their home area to which many return at the end of their stay.

Further, should a young person get into difficulty after leaving a residential unit and contact staff for help and advice, all practical steps are taken to ensure the young person is not left in a dangerous situation, which could involve overnight temporary accommodation in a unit at the manager's discretion, or other practical assistance and advice.

6.9 Ensure that additional statistics are gathered to help monitor what is happening

We collect data on an individual basis on each young person. As referred to above, we are presently involved in systematic self-evaluation, as part of a Quality Assurance process.

Requirements for further reporting will be considered as part of future Carefirst developments.

6.10 Encourage the Scottish Government to consider amending the legal threshold for aftercare;

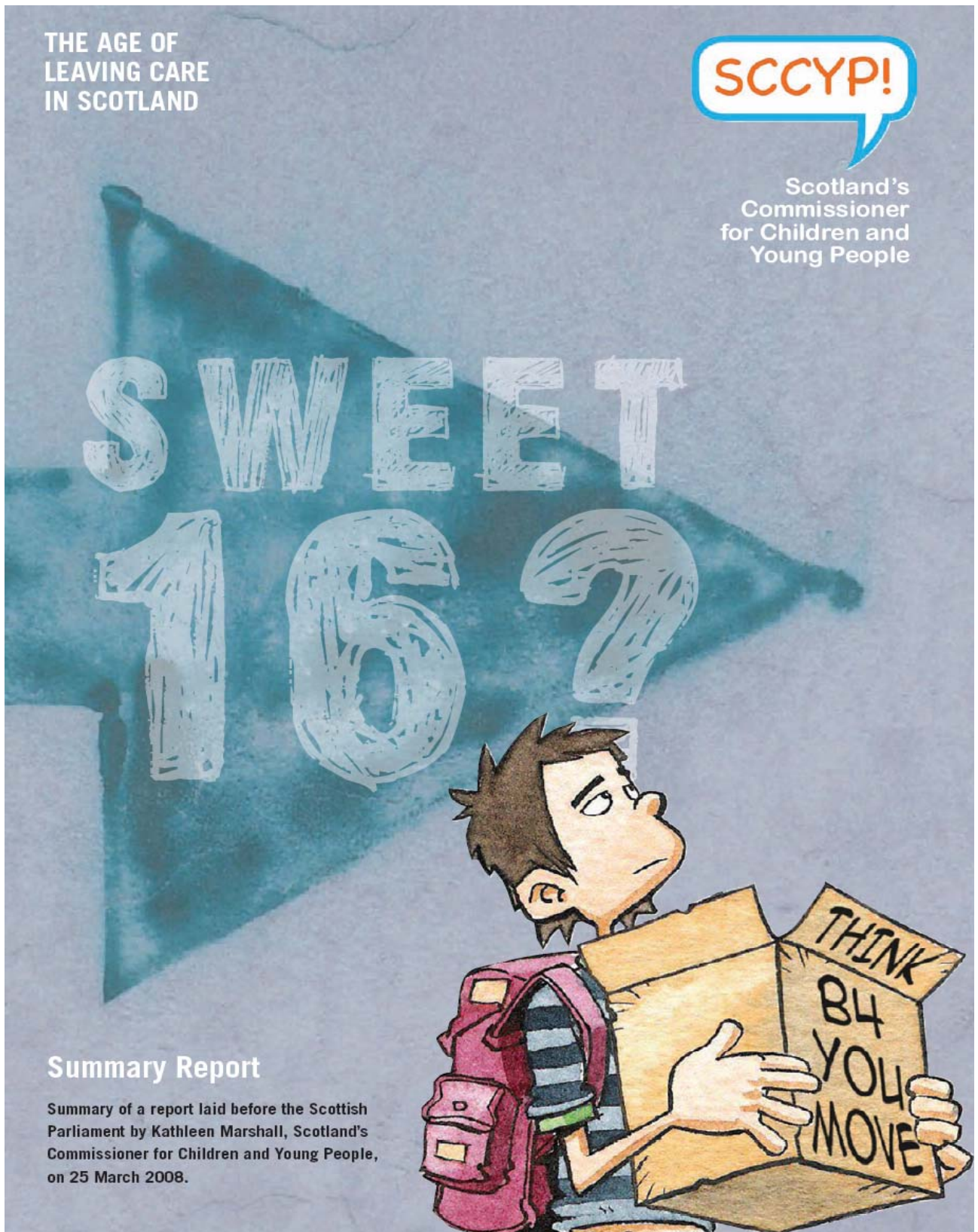
Children's services in Highland have always taken a progressive approach to these age thresholds, and members may wish to take a view about representing the Children's Commissioners objectives to Government.

Recommendations

The Joint Committee is asked to consider the issues raised in the 'Sweet 16' report, and in this response to the recommendations.

Linda MacLennan

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SWEET 16?

Summary of a report laid before the Scottish Parliament by Kathleen Marshall, Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People, on 25 March 2008.

The Issue

This report shows that many young people in Scotland are leaving care aged 16 or 17, when they are not ready to face the challenges this presents. Problems include getting into rent arrears, becoming involved with drugs/alcohol, difficulties with neighbours, threat of eviction which sometimes leads to homelessness, and difficulties sustaining education.

The Research

This report involved desk research as well as:

- A review of information from all 32 local authorities about their policies and material about leaving care;
- Interviews and focus groups in 13 local authority areas. (These involved a total of 85 people: 54 young people and 31 workers. Half of the young people were still in care and half had left care); and
- More extensive work in two areas (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Highland), involving meetings with representatives of those authorities.

Law, policy and practice

Scottish law and policy strongly advise that young people should be encouraged and supported to stay in care until 18 years of age where their welfare requires it. But government statistics show that eight times as many young people leave care at 16 as leave at 18.



The threshold for aftercare

Young people are entitled to aftercare only if they were looked after by the local authority on or after reaching the minimum school leaving age. This is not widely understood. Some young people are discharged from supervision requirements shortly before reaching this threshold, thus making them ineligible, even though they may have spent a substantial or significant part of their life in care.

A staged approach or abrupt transition?

For most young people who live with their families, there can be “trial” periods of independence. If it all goes wrong, they can return home, for a while at least. Young care leavers generally do not have this option. There are both resource and regulatory barriers to them returning to their former place of care. The report discusses this, but also identifies some examples of good practice that others might wish to follow. The report suggests there should be more investment in semi-independent living units that act as a staging post towards independence and may provide somewhere to come back to when things go wrong.

Inappropriate placements

The report shows that too many young people are still being placed in B&B establishments and homeless hostels, despite official guidance to the contrary. Examples are given of some of the dangers young people have faced in these placements, including one where a young person was in a B&B with a convicted murderer as a fellow guest. The report recommends that recourse to these options should be forbidden.

Lack of information and training

It became clear that too many workers and young people lacked accurate information about what young people were entitled to and should expect. As part of this project, SCCYP worked with Who Cares? Scotland to produce a leaflet on young people's rights on leaving care. Both the content and design were shaped by young care leavers and the leaflet has been very well received. However, more needs to be done. Training on aftercare rights should be extended beyond throughcare and aftercare teams to include, for example, housing staff.

The Corporate Parent

In April 2007, the Scottish Executive Education Department issued guidance for local authorities on the exercise of their corporate parenting role in relation to children and young people looked after by them. It encouraged them to develop a council strategy on corporate parenting, backed up by political scrutiny. It suggested ways in which awareness could be raised amongst elected members, including some suggested induction material for new members. The report welcomes this development.

Conclusion

Turning 16 should be a sweet and exciting prospect, not a source of anxiety. It should not be the end of “care”.



Reasons for leaving care before 18

The report explores some of the reasons why young people leave care before 18, for example:

- **Young people want independence:** Young people sometimes say they want their independence at 16. For some this is true. They may resent the rules in a residential unit and the presence of younger children. But it is important to explore what lies behind the expressed desire and not take it at face value. Sometimes the “desire” is a result of pressure exerted on the young person by staff who believe 16 is the appropriate age and suggest through their words or actions that it is time for a young person to move on. Many of the young people we spoke to had expressed a similar desire, but later regretted leaving care so early. They were very keen to work with us to ensure that other young people learned from their experiences.
- **Age of admission to care:** Young people who enter the care system aged 15 may see themselves as just passing time until they are 16. There is little time to prepare for leaving care in a meaningful way.
- **Contact with birth parents:** Some young people have sadly unrealistic hopes about fitting back in with their families. They convince themselves that things will be better than they were before. Sometimes parents too collude in what turns out to be wishful thinking.



- **Challenging behaviour and high level support needs:** We were told that young people whose behaviour caused difficulties were often helped to leave the system early. Yet these are the ones who need the support most. Where a young person's behaviour was difficult, staff might heave a sigh of relief at any expressed desire for independence and encourage them towards that. 16-18 can be a difficult time for all young people, but for those in care, the consequences of challenging behaviour can be dramatic and highly detrimental.
- **Culture and practice:** Time and again, young people and workers told us about a strong culture that assumed 16 was the age at which young people should leave care. This was reinforced by language about “moving on” introduced before the young person was 16 and by practices such as filling out housing applications forms soon after their 16th birthdays.
- **Type of placement:** Young people in foster care were less likely to leave before 18 than young people in residential units. There were particular problems associated with residential schools where education funding may be withdrawn once the young person reaches school leaving age. These young people have often been placed outwith their local authority area and may not have retained strong links with their home town. This can make it particularly difficult for them to settle down in a supportive environment in their home town.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Local authority statistics should be further broken down to show the numbers of 15 and 16-year-olds leaving care before and after minimum school leaving age. These should be forwarded to the Scottish Government to be included in the annual analysis.

Recommendation 2

Local authorities should record the details of children and young people placed in other areas, along with information about their contact with social workers or children's rights officers from their home areas while they were placed away from that area, and information about what happened when they left care. Statistical information extracted from this should be forwarded to the Scottish Government to be included in the annual analysis.

Recommendation 3 Firm steps must be taken to change the culture that expects young people to leave care at 16. Local authority policy and practice should emphasise that proper care until 18, and appropriate support thereafter, is a right and not an option. Elected members should be advised to ask for information about the ages of young people leaving care in their area as part of their corporate parenting role.

Recommendation 4

Workers and young people should be given clear statements of young people's rights on leaving care and how to pursue them.

Recommendation 5

Care should be taken to ensure that professional language and practice do not create an expectation that a young person will leave care at 16.

Recommendation 4

Workers and young people should be given clear statements of young people's rights on leaving care and how to pursue them.

Recommendation 5

Care should be taken to ensure that professional language and practice do not create an expectation that a young person will leave care at 16.

Recommendation 6

Local authorities should consult young people in residential care about the rules that apply in their units in order to ensure that they are appropriate.

Recommendation 7

Local authorities should consider developing more semi-independent living units, as well as supported accommodation where care leavers who are parents can be taught and supported to care for their children.

Recommendation 8

Local authorities should analyse the patterns of behaviour of those who leave before 18 as compared with those who stay and take steps to respect the rights of young people with high level support needs and challenging behaviour.

Recommendation 9

The Scottish Government should be encouraged to pursue its expressed intention to help young people to remain with their foster carers after their 18th birthday. Consideration should be given to extending this to those not in education or employment.

Recommendation 10

When local authorities place young people in residential schools, they should think ahead to what will happen when the young person reaches school leaving age. They should take steps to allow the young person to continue to live at the school at least up to age 18 or prepare the way for a smooth return to a supportive placement in the home area.

Recommendation 11

The Scottish Government should consider adding Registered Social Landlords to the list of agencies subject to the duty under section 21 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 to assist local authorities in carrying out their statutory duties.

Recommendation 12

As part of its corporate parent role, local authorities should ensure that housing officers, as well as social workers, residential workers and throughcare and aftercare teams, are trained to understand the local authority's responsibilities towards young people leaving care. There may be advantages in training them together.

Recommendation 13

Young people leaving public care should not have to be made "homeless" in order to be regarded as a priority for housing allocation. Local authorities should ensure that their housing policies give priority to these young people merely as an aspect of their corporate parenting responsibility.

Recommendation 14

Young people should not be placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation. The Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order effectively bans the use of such accommodation for families with children. The Scottish Government should consider banning its use for young people leaving care.

Recommendation 15

Young people should not be placed in hostels for the homeless.

Recommendation 16

As corporate parents, local authorities should make provision for care leavers to be able to return for short periods of support, preferably to the accommodation they had before leaving care.

Recommendation 17

The Scottish Government should consider the need for clarification or amendment of child protection regulations and policies to ensure that unnecessary barriers are not put in the way of care leavers staying overnight in residential or former foster placements.

Recommendation 18

The Scottish Government should review the eligibility threshold for aftercare. Currently, a young person would not qualify for aftercare where he or she ceased to be looked after before reaching school leaving age, even where they had spent a significant amount of time in the care of the local authority. In the meantime, local authorities and children's panel trainers should ensure that workers and panel members are aware of the eligibility criteria and the relevant dates so that they do not inadvertently close off options for aftercare support.

Recommendation 19

The Scottish Executive commitment to more robust and comprehensive data collection and reporting in relation to educational outcomes for looked after children and young people should be extended to cover the implementation and impact of the Pathways planning legislation, policies and practice.

Recommendation 20

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar should examine the reasons for the high number of young people leaving care before the age of 18, and in particular, the high number leaving residential care at 15.

Recommendation 21

Elected members in Comhairle nan Eilean Siar should, as part of their commitment to corporate parenting: monitor the number of care leavers living in B&B establishments; visit the area where the chalets used for care leavers are located and assess their desirability, taking account of information from the police; and take steps to ensure that there is appropriate accommodation for care leavers in their area.

Recommendation 22

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar should check whether their written policies on throughcare and aftercare are known to workers, young people and appropriate external agencies and are considered adequate.

Recommendation 23

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar should be encouraged to pursue its plan to formalise its relationship with those contracted to provide its Pathways service through the conclusion of a service level agreement.

Appendix 2

CONCERN	RESPONSE
1. That there are inconsistent practices across Highland.	It was difficult to achieve consistency in an area as vast and diverse as the Highland and with such dispersed staff. The Council was working with Barnardos towards a strategy that would involve more supported accommodation
2. That there are a lot of discretionary things.	It was legitimate to use discretion in applying policy to individual cases. The Council cited an incentive scheme that had been developed after consultation with young people and much debate in the Council's Children's Committee. It might appear ad hoc to those young people who did not benefit from it. It was a question of perception and communication
3. That young people feel pressurised to leave care at 16.	The Council felt this was not supported by the figures. The average age for leaving care was 17.02 years. Some young people wanted to leave care early. The culture was difficult to shift.
4. That there is particular pressure to leave if a young person has been the focus of trouble.	Residential units worked hard to hold onto young people and support them through difficult periods, sometimes with the support of CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services).
5. That children's panels do not understand the definition of "school leaving age" as the threshold for aftercare, therefore some young people miss out.	Highland had tried to clarify this through references to the school leaving date rather than school leaving age. It was agreed that this would be discussed with the chair of the Children's Panel and more emphasis would be given to the issue in training.
6. That the system is unhelpful – you get more (housing) points if you are 16/17, which increases the pressure to leave at that age.	Young people do not need to present as homeless to be considered for housing. The perception may arise because, under current homelessness arrangements, all young people ages 16/17 are automatically considered to be in priority need for housing. The Council treats all looked after children as priority need in relation to homelessness.
7. That the reality is that you need to present as homeless to get a flat.	Young people do not need to present as homeless to apply for socially rented housing. However, there is a lack of social rented housing in many areas. Young people do become impatient in their care setting and may hold a belief that by presenting as homeless they will be housed more quickly. During the meeting the Director of Housing said they were in the process of changing their housing allocation policy to give priority to care leavers as part of their general housing policy, quite apart from any criterion of homelessness.

<p>8. That most young people leave care at 16 and move into B&Bs or hostels; some stay for 8 months to a year on average.</p>	<p>At the time of the meeting, there were 11 care leavers in B&Bs and 2 in hostels. Some of these provided informal support. The Council thought B&B was sometimes appropriate so long as it was properly regulated. They had stopped using some establishments in recent months. There had been some talk of including former looked after children in the Unsuitable Accommodation Order as a category for whom B&B was not appropriate, but they had not been included. It was suggested that this was something the Commissioner might wish to follow up.</p>
<p>9. That some young people get a Housing Association flat for a maximum of two years. If nothing is available after that, they go to B&B.</p>	<p>It was agreed this was the situation and it was something the Council was looking at. The Director of Housing had asked his staff to look at the possibility of making these flats into permanent homes for these young people.</p>
<p>10. That some B&Bs are diabolical. If young people miss their early breakfast they have to pay to eat elsewhere. There is no access to cooking facilities. Some are private. Staff are not vetted. They are full of people of all ages and backgrounds.</p>	<p>It was accepted that this was a difficult situation for young people, especially when they were on very low incomes. The availability of cooking and laundry facilities at Barnardo's in Inverness and Lochaber could not be seen as more than a short term and very partial solution. The Chief Executive said he would ask his staff to review the placements of 11 young people in B&B.</p>
<p>11. That the cost of B&B is very high.</p>	<p>This was accepted. The Council would look at the cost to see whether the money could be better spent to support these young people.</p>
<p>12. That young people in B&Bs and in homeless accommodation such as hostels may be exposed to drug and alcohol users.</p>	<p>See 13 below</p>
<p>13. That some are placed in hostels where, according to a worker, there are some "seriously scary guys". Young people in hostels are living in fear. A worker reported that an adult resident in a hostel at the same time as young people had been convicted for bludgeoning a woman to death.</p>	<p>The case of the person convicted for killing a woman probably related to a B&B placement rather than a hostel. He was put there because he was not a registered sex offender. The Commissioner asked how it could be appropriate to place a vulnerable young person into a situation where this kind of thing could not be controlled or avoided. After discussion it was agreed that it would be best to move away from the idea that B&B could be an acceptable option. The Council would review its use of B&B and hostels within aftercare provision.</p>

<p>14. That there are no supported lodgings/residential schools/specialist units in the Highlands.</p>	<p>Some young people were in supported lodgings outwith the Highlands. There were plans to introduce a supported lodgings scheme within the Highlands. Although there was currently no formal system of supported lodgings, relationships with specific providers meant that some did provide a more supportive environment. Work was ongoing to formalise this.</p>
<p>15. That there is no dedicated Young Persons' Housing Officer (although there is a pilot in Ross & Cromarty – Housing Liaison Group for all Young People).</p>	<p>It was difficult to provide specialist services in remote areas. The Council was confident that housing staff were able to deal appropriately with young people. There is however a dedicated young tenants officer in Inverness Merkinch that the Council believes has been very effective. The Director of Housing has agreed to adopt liaison arrangements being piloted in Ross-shire in other housing teams.</p>
<p>16. That the system can't cope if you or your partner have a baby.</p>	<p>A number of scenarios were discussed and the Council agreed to look into one that had presented problems.</p>
<p>17. That young people experienced a gap in income at 18 for 2 weeks between ceasing local authority payments and transferring to the national system through DWP.</p>	<p>This was a national issue. Highland continued to pay young people during the two week period and thought other councils did the same.</p>
<p>18. That some unit arrangements seemed designed to suit staff rather than residents, e.g. bed at 11 pm, no staff awake, if young people leave rooms for toilet/drinks, alarm will go off.</p>	<p>The specific scenario giving rise to the concern was discussed and the Commissioner accepted the explanation.</p>
<p>19. That there is a lack of information for young people leaving care.</p>	<p>It was agreed that leaflets for young people could be improved.</p>
<p>20. That staff believe wrongly (as a result of training) that young people qualify for aftercare only if they were accommodation rather than just "looked after".</p>	<p>It was accepted that training on the financial aspect of aftercare might had led some staff to believe that the more general right to aftercare was subject to some of the same constraints. The Council would review this. The Council would also look at extending training to relevant staff across Council services.</p>
<p>21.</p>	<p>Council officials indicated their intention to give a much higher profile to promoting corporate responsibility for these young people.</p>