Department for Education

New Belongings: an evaluation

Research report

October 2016

Jo Dixon and Claire Baker

GSR
GOVERNMENT SOCIAL RESEARCH
Social Science in Government

Contents

List of figures 5
List of tables 6
i. Acknowledgements 6
ii. The report and the authors 7
iii Executive Summary 8
The New Belongings programme 8
Evaluation approach 9
Findings 10
1. Chapter one. Introduction: background and methodology 17
1.1 Why was New Belongings needed? 17
1.2 What is New Belongings? 18
1.2.1 Applying to take part in New Belongings 19
1.2.2. Delivery of the New Belongings programme 19
1.2.3 Core elements of New Belongings approach 20
1.2.4 New Belongings - developing a 'Gold Standard' service 21
1.3 Evaluation aims and methodology 22
1.4 Summary points for chapter one 24
2. Chapter two. Starting points: local authorities and the New Belongings programme 26
2.1 The New Belongings local authorities 26
2.2 The New Belongings care leaver survey 27
2.2.1 Survey Responses 28
2.2.2 The views of young people leaving care 30
2.2.3 What advice did care leavers offer to young people in care? 33
2.3 Developing the leaving care service self-assessment tool 34
2.4 Self-assessment in the New Belongings local authorities 37
2.4.1 Assessing leaving care services – the gold standard 38
2.4.2 Performance within the 10 gold standard areas 39
2.4.3 Local authority performance at baseline 43
2.5 Young people's views of the gold standard 44
2.6 Summary Points for chapter two 46
3. Chapter three. New Belongings in action 47
3.1 Undertake a care leaver survey 47
3.1.1 Did the survey work as planned? 47
3.2 Review the role and experience of Personal Advisers 50
3.3 Care leaver forum 54

3.4 Develop multi-agency work plans 60
3.5 Ensure strategic commitment and corporate parenting 65
3.6 Delivering the New Belongings programme 67
3.7 Summary points for chapter three 72
4. Chapter four. Progress in local authorities during the New Belongings year. 75
4.1 Local authority performance at follow up 75
4.1.1 Factors that helped local authorities to make progress in the gold standard areas 76
4.2 Corporate parents: changes in approach to care leavers over the past year 79
4.3 Summary points for Chapter four 80
5. Chapter five. What facilitated progress in the New Belongings local authorities? 82
5.1 Strength of young people's voice 82
5.2 Cluster approach 87
5.2.1 Providing peer challenge 87
5.2.2 Sharing ideas and resources 88
5.2.3 Working across boundaries 90
5.2.4 Improving cluster work 90
5.3 The National profile and reach of New Belongings 91
5.4 Implementation timescales and resources 94
5.4.1 Capacity to embed the New Belongings programme in local authorities 95
5.4.2 Resources 97
5.5 Strategic buy-in and working together 98
5.5.1 Engaging partners and the wider community 99
Summary points for Chapter five 103
6. Chapter six. Conclusion and recommendations from the New Belongings Programme: putting care leavers on the map? 105
Taking the New Belongings model forward 108
7. References 110
Appendix 1 Evaluation methodology 112
Document review and analysis 112
Secondary analysis of care leaver survey data 112
Self-assessment tool 112
Telephone interviews with local authority staff 112
Focus groups with New Belongings personnel 112
Case study areas 113
Focus groups with young people 113

Online survey to corporate parenting partners 114
Appendix 2 The Baker & Dixon Leaving Care Services Self-Assessment Framework115

List of figures

Figure 1 The NB methodology 21
Figure 2 New Belongings evaluation work streams 23
Figure 3 Being consulted and listened to 31
Figure 4 The NB gold standard areas 35
Figure 5 Example of self-assessment tool 36
Figure 6 Gold standard exercise during focus groups 44

List of tables

Table 1 Cluster configuration 20
Table 2 Ofsted Ratings 26
Table 3 Response rate to care leaver survey across 23 local authorities 29
Table 4 Self-Assessment Response Rates 37
Table 5 Gold standard areas in order of performance at baseline (n=19) 40
Table 6 Top 10 items at baseline ranked highest to lowest 41
Table 7 Lowest scoring 10 items at baseline ranked highest to lowest 42
Table 8 Performance categories 43
Table 9 Local authority change over time 76
Table 10 The views of corporate parents 80
Table 11 Examples of Changing Practice in New Belongings Local Authorities 93

i. Acknowledgements

Thank you to the local authorities that have taken time to respond to evaluation requests for data over the past year. In particular, we appreciate the help of the five in-depth sites, which undertook additional tasks to help us further understand their work, including taking part in interviews, surveys and helping to set up focus groups with care leavers.

Thank you also to the New Belongings team for providing copies of reports and programme documents, and for inviting the evaluation team to the two programme learning and dissemination events to meet the participating local authorities.

Finally, we must acknowledge the generous contribution that the care leavers who took part in our focus groups have made; their insights and views were invaluable.

ii. The report and the authors

This report is based on an independent evaluation of the New Belongings programme and was commissioned by the Department for Education.

The evaluation took place from May 2015 to June 2016 across the 28 English local authorities that participated in the programme. It captured the implementation and early progress and impact of Phase 2 of the New Belongings programme.

The report contains data from a range of sources including New Belongings programme documentation and secondary analysis of care leaver survey data from across the 28 local authorities. It also includes primary data from interviews with local authority staff, young people leaving care and New Belongings facilitators and panellists. It also draws on data from the leaving care services self-assessment framework that was created during the early stage of the evaluation. Examples of practice and learning are presented throughout the report.

Jo Dixon has been researching experiences and outcomes for vulnerable children and young people for the past 18 years at the Universities of London and York and as Research Manager with Catch 22's National Care Advisory Service. Since coming to York in 2000, Jo's research has focused on young people in and leaving care. She has led three national studies of care leavers (in Scotland and in England) and has worked directly with care leavers, setting up projects that provide care experienced young people with training and work related skills. Jo is currently Research Fellow at the Department of Social Policy and Social Work and Honorary Researcher at the Social Policy Research Unit, University of York. She has published nationally and internationally on issues affecting young people in and leaving care. Jo is committed to ensuring that research feeds into practice and contributes regularly to Making Research Count workshops

Dr. Claire Baker worked as National Senior Policy Manager for the National Care Advisory Service (NCAS), part of young people's charity Catch22 for 8 years. In its policy work NCAS sought to improve the transitions to independence of young people in local authority care by influencing the legislative and policy context. Claire was pivotal to the success of this work. Prior to this Claire worked as a Research Fellow at the Social Work Research and Development Unit at the University of York, concentrating on children in and leaving care (particularly disabled children), children in foster care, and stability and permanence issues. During this time she completed a PhD entitled 'Disabled foster children: the slow climb up the permanency ladder' and has published work in this area. Currently Claire works as an independent research and practice expert and consultant on issues relating to young people in care and leaving care.

iii Executive Summary

The New Belongings programme

Funding was provided to the Care Leavers' Foundation to run the New Belongings (NB) programme. The programme originated in response to continuing evidence of poor outcomes for many young people leaving care and the variability of service provision to support them. The first phase piloted the NB approach[1] and ran from March 2013 for 18 months. Phase 2 followed and worked with a greater number of authorities for one year, ending in March 2016. The key aims of NB were to:

1. Increase the extent to which local authorities (LAs) used the experience and wisdom of care leavers to take decisions about the services provided to care leavers
2. Ensure that LAs engaged all the services of the authority and its partners in providing excellent services and support
3. Help authorities engage effectively the wider local community in the task of improving the daily lives and future life chances of care leavers.

To achieve these aims, the NB programme set out six core components for LAs to undertake:

1. Survey their local care leavers to understand priorities for improvement
2. Conduct a review of the role and experience of Personal Advisers (PAs)
3. Establish a forum of care leavers to help the authority in shaping decisions about changes to services
4. Prepare a plan for improvement based on understanding of local needs gained from the three previous steps
5. Obtain the support of senior leadership, especially the Chief Executive and political leadership, to help join up the services of the council and its partners
6. Use the influence of the political leadership of the council to engage the wider community to enable care leavers to participate fully in their communities. (See New Belongings Guide 2016 for more detail).

In total 28 LAs across England were accepted into Phase 2. These formed 'clusters'[2], which were mostly based on geographic proximity. LAs were supported by the NB team,

[1] Phase 1 evaluation report
[2] LAs worked in clusters of between two and six local authorities and met together at least quarterly. The LAs exchanged plans and information about what they were doing in their individual projects, at times they worked together on the delivery of some services for care leavers (New Belongings Guide, 2016).

which included an overall project manager, facilitators[3] and 'care leaver panellists' who were assigned to each LA and their cluster.

Although all 28 LAs were asked to use the same approach, the intention was that they developed plans that were tailored to their local context. The core elements of the NB model were designed to ensure a whole LA approach, i.e. that there was a role for everyone at each level. Young people's views were central to the overall approach and all elements were expected to link-up.

Evaluation approach

The independent evaluation, commissioned by DfE, began in May 2015 and focused on Phase 2 of the NB programme. The main aims were to:

1. Describe the different components of the NB approach
2. Understand what was needed to implement a successful NB approach
3. Explore if, and how, the NB approach impacted on the experiences of care leavers and the delivery of services to support them.

The mixed-methods approach utilised in the evaluation included: the development of a new self-assessment framework for LAs to rate their own service performance in 10 'gold standard' areas at the start and end of the programme; secondary analysis of the LA's care leavers' survey results; and programme reports along with interviews with NB and LA staff leads. Five case study areas were selected for more detailed exploration and involved focus groups with young people and an online survey of the wider group of corporate parents to explore their perceptions of support for care leavers in their own services. Case study areas were chosen to represent examples of promising practice, as identified in their self-assessment returns, their care leaver surveys and by recommendations from the NB facilitators.

The evaluation aimed to illustrate the key types of activity undertaken by the LAs, rather than replicate the more detailed accounts provided in LA and programme documentation and reports. The NB team has, for example, captured a fuller picture of the LAs' work during the programme, through their shared learning events and end of project guidebook (See New Belongings Guide 2016).

Overall, there was a good level of engagement from LAs and the NB team with the evaluation, which produced a considerable body of data. There are, however, some limitations in the data and subsequent findings.

[3] The purpose of the facilitator role was to guide, support and help co-ordinate the work within LAs and their clusters. The facilitators worked alongside a panel of care leaver experts, known as 'panellists'. These care leavers provided advice and experience to participating LAs and their local care leavers.

This raises the potential of bias within the sample (e.g. those who were more fully engaged with the programme might have been more likely to respond to requests for data). The findings also largely rely on self-reporting of progress through reviews of the LA and NB progress reports and the self-assessment tool, which were taken at face value and not independently scrutinised. There were also limitations due to low sample size and response rates, which impacted on the types of data analysis possible. A final limitation was related to the timing of the evaluation: one year proved to be insufficient for the NB programme and LAs to fully implement all the components of the programme; action the work plans; and deliver on plans to achieve service improvement. The evaluation ran alongside the one-year timescale and whilst it was able to capture the journey through the early stages of NB it was, in most cases, too soon to capture much more than emerging evidence of change and impact (see Chapter 1).

Findings

The evaluation findings draw together the evidence available from the document review, care leaver surveys, interviews with LA representatives, focus groups with young people and the survey of corporate parents.

New Belongings in action: use of the NB methodology

The evaluation looked at each of the components of the NB approach to understand how it was working in action. Evidence suggested there was variation across the 28 LAs in the extent to which they were able, or willing, to commit to the NB programme and, consequently, there was a diverse picture in terms of how fully and successfully the NB methodology was utilised. Though it was apparent that the programme had not worked as well for some, there was clear evidence that in most LAs the programme (or certainly particular components within it) had been embraced. A notable aspect of the NB programme was the continued level of engagement across the 28 LAs, with seemingly low attrition rates. Within the first year of NB phase 2 most LAs had carried out a care leaver survey (see Chapter 2), established, or strengthened, their care leaver forums and prepared a work plan based on issues raised by young people (see Chapter 3).

The evaluation suggested scope for a number of improvements to the NB methodology. These included: diversifying the ways in which the care leaver survey was distributed in order to increase the response rate; ensuring that young people had a range of opportunities to participate in their LAs; and increasing the reach of the programme to more partners both within the LA and the wider community. The LAs generally felt that more time was needed in order to complete the core components and that extra support could be useful with certain aspects of the approach, such as analysis of survey data.

There was variation in the extent to which LAs took up support offered by the NB team of facilitators and panellists. In a small number of LAs this support had not been used. For others, the facilitators and panellists had performed the ‘role of critical friend’, which had been welcomed. Part of the role of panellists was to provide advice and experience to

authorities and local care leavers, however, a barrier to achieving this was matching the panellist to the LA. For example, a number lived at some distance from the LA, which at times had prohibited how often and how in-depth their work with the LA and young people could be.

Overall, evidence pointed to the core components of the NB model as both achievable and, on the whole, useful to services seeking to improve their offer to care leavers.

What facilitated progress in NB authorities?

Evidence from the available data indicated that there were a number of factors that influenced how far the NB programme had been adopted into LA practice. Key to the approach was having active channels for listening to and responding with care leavers; working together in 'clusters'; ensuring strategic support and maximising the benefits gained from being part of a high profile national programme (see Chapter 5).

- **Strength of young people's voice**

A central feature of the NB model was the extent to which young people influenced service design. For the NB team, this was the element in which they expected, and sought, most progress from the LAs as it was considered to be the foundation for building change. The evaluation found that LAs were at different stages in the degree to which young people were actually influencing decision making, and the strength of the links that young people had with their corporate parenting representatives. Whilst the evaluation found a number of examples of positive work in this area with young people actively shaping decision making in their services overall, evidence suggested that the work to embed this was generally still at the embryonic stage.

Factors that promoted young people's voice included increasing the number and range of opportunities for care leavers to meet senior leaders. Face to face meetings were reported as particularly powerful, as was undertaking awareness raising activities across the council departments that highlighted the particular needs of this group.

A small number of authorities had formalised the ways in which they facilitated engagement of their carer leavers by creating designated roles. This included 'ambassador' roles, traineeships, young inspectors and creating specific projects that were young person-led.

A remaining challenge was to increase the number of young people, particularly from more vulnerable care leaver groups, whose voices were actively heard and who engaged with such activities. It was recognised that this not only served to empower young people but also provided opportunities to reduce isolation through networking and participation. LAs and young people proposed shifting the model of work so that care leavers were more involved in the design and leadership of participation activities.

One of the main aims of the NB programme was to ensure that the wisdom and experiences of care leavers were used. The findings indicated that, generally, there was a sense that care leavers were becoming more visible. Furthermore, as LAs started to increase the extent to which their care leavers influenced service development, the emerging benefits, for both the individual young people taking part (increased confidence and skills for some young people), as well as service delivery (challenging stereotypes and informing work) increased. The LAs and young people taking part in the evaluation were optimistic about the benefits such opportunities could bring though they felt it was too early to see real impact. Overall, the process of listening more to young people had been an important one and something many planned to build and improve upon.

- **Cluster working**

One of the main reported benefits of the NB programme was cluster working. An objective of the NB approach was to spread knowledge across the participating LAs and the cluster approach provided a useful channel for achieving this. Most LAs identified the cluster working as aiding progress and shared learning. Evaluation participants reported that it provided welcome peer challenge and support through sharing knowledge, experience and resources, with evidence of replication (e.g. importing ideas from another NB LA) as well as a degree of benchmarking and leverage (e.g. *if they can do it, why can't we?*). There was also emerging evidence of working across LA boundaries at sub-regional level within cluster groups. Testament to the success of the cluster approach was the fact that a number of LAs intended to continue working in this way beyond the end of the NB programme.

- **National kudos**

Most NB LAs had found it helpful to be part of a national programme. For some, it had bolstered their identity by being part of something bigger. LAs also welcomed the benefits of being *in this* together and reducing the sense of working in isolation, and at times reflected that being part of a national programme had brought some additional weight and leverage that had helped to maintain a focus on care leavers despite competing in-house pressures and priorities. Inevitably being part of a project came with associated reporting requirement, which for some, though not all, provided timely reminders and helped to keep their work on track.

- **Strategic 'buy-in' and working together**

The NB programme requested that LAs demonstrated engagement from strategic leads and from the wider corporate, business and social community. This was seen as pivotal to progress in the LAs and was a central aim of the NB programme. The evaluation found

mixed experiences in the extent to which commitment was demonstrated by senior leaders and corporate parents.

There was evidence in some LAs that the Chief Executive had shown strong support of the NB programme, which had thereby brought greater attention to care leavers. Equally, increasing the direct involvement of care leavers in LA corporate parenting structures and increasing the number and quality of interactions between senior decision makers and other local area committees (such as the chamber of commerce) had brought leaving care to the attention of the wider community. In some cases, this had an impact on the provision of support (e.g. increased traineeships for care leavers and reduced stereotyping).

Not all LAs were able to report success in this area, however. The evaluation found one of the least developed areas of the NB programme appeared to be engaging wider community partners. These relationships were usually the ones in which leaving care services had least control over and as a result often took more time to develop. Despite this, some examples were given of burgeoning partnerships and enhanced awareness of the needs of care leavers (See Chapter 5).

Barriers to progress

Barriers to progress with activities involved: diminishing or limited resources (such as access to funding for activities); staff capacity (linked to the stability of management and staff working with care leavers); and the degree to which LAs could gain '*buy-in from some departments'.* Other issues were located within young people's own experiences, their readiness or willingness to engage with opportunities created, as well as the lack of support available to them post-18 from services in general.

Progress in local authorities during the NB year

The evaluation looked at whether the NB approach had impacted on the experiences of care leavers and the delivery of services. In order to do this a new self-assessment tool was created by the evaluation team for LAs to rate their performance in the gold standard areas at baseline and follow-up (see Chapter 2).

- **Self-assessment and care leaver survey**

The concept of a 'gold standard' for leaving care services was conceived by the NB team during Phase 1 of the NB programme and was characterised by whether care leavers feel: *'cared for; cared about and able to care for themselves'*. A challenge for NB during Phase 2 was to further develop this idea, explore how to define it in practice and understand what LAs might need to do to achieve it.

As a starting point, the NB team identified 10 gold standard areas (e.g. 'helped into work'; 'having good health and wellbeing' and 'having an adequate level of income'). Following

on from this, the evaluation team developed a range of indicator statements (items) based on each of the 10 areas to create a self-assessment framework. The aim of the framework was to help services to understand how they were performing in relation to the gold standard and identify their particular strengths and areas requiring improvement (see Appendix 2).

Two-thirds (68%) of local authorities completed the self-assessment at baseline. Analysis of responses showed that the gold standard areas most commonly identified as in need of attention and improvement related to providing effective, timely and appropriate preparation for independent living and addressing the mental health and wellbeing needs of care leavers.

These themes resonated with key messages arising from the 800 or so young people who completed the NB care leaver surveys. Evidence contained within survey responses highlighted the need to balance the often sought after desire for independence and freedom, with more gradual and effective preparation. High on the agenda for many care leavers was an opportunity for a 'rehearsal' or 'trial run', via the use of training flats and independent living skills courses. This was accompanied by a need for better support to help young people adjust to living on their own, which for many was accompanied by feelings of isolation and loneliness and was highlighted as the worst aspects of leaving care.
Evidence gathered from young people via the survey and forums, and from LAs via their self-assessments and reviews of the PA role, pointed to similar areas where services were poorly performing and attention was needed. Top of the agenda for many was improving the ways in which preparation and planning support was delivered to and experienced by young people leaving care. Related to this was addressing the stark degree to which loneliness and isolation was identified by care leavers as a significant problem, reflected also in the LAs identification of access to health and wellbeing support as being the gold standard area in most need of attention.

Despite this cohesion of views, not all LAs had focussed their attention on these areas. For those that had not yet progressed them, reasons were linked to the fact that some needed first to address more basic areas of delivery, the 'nuts and bolts', such as ensuring entitlements were understood and PA relationships with young people were adequately in place, before they were able to tackle other areas (see Chapter 4).

- **Progress in NB authorities**

The self-assessment was completed again around six months later to look at changes in how LAs rated performance in the gold standard areas. Though statistical analysis was not possible due to the small sample size and response rates, data suggested that the direction of travel during the NB programme for those reviewing their performance was positive with all bar one reporting an improvement in provision. This was particularly true

of those LAs scoring lowest at baseline, suggesting that service improvement support, such as that offered by the NB methodology, might be particularly effective in helping struggling services to improve.

Overall, the LAs in Phase 2 could be broadly categorised as having used the NB approach in the following ways:

1. **To get the basics rights** (for example: developing staff knowledge and shared learning; raising awareness of care leavers across services; ensuring that statutory duties were fulfilled; and putting mechanisms in place for care leavers to contribute and have their voices heard and acted upon)
2. **To innovate and stretch themselves** (for example: looking at the responsiveness of their delivery model and adapting it accordingly to the needs of care leavers; exploring and/or introducing new ways of working within their service; to actively join with external partners, such as other LAs, to make better use of provision and resources);

New Belongings in context

An important factor, acknowledged by both the NB team and LAs themselves, was that the NB programme did not exist in a policy and practice vacuum but within a wider package of change and service development. NB was often described by LAs as a useful source of support; bringing enthusiasm and providing a framework to keep things on track. At times it was perceived to have expedited and improved the process of change, especially through partnership working in clusters.

The main benefit appeared be in how the NB methodology steadfastly focused on the central importance of care leavers' voices and ensured that young people remained central to the process. NB generally sat well alongside wider work. On balance, evidence from the evaluation suggested that the NB programme had served to support progress rather than necessarily creating change.

The future of New Belongings in the local authorities

When considering future plans, a number of LAs said they were planning to continue using components of the NB methodology to progress their work and were optimistic that they would see impact from their work. In particular, there were plans to continue the cluster work and some LAs were committed to continuing with their work plans to complete actions that were underway or developing new plans for the coming year. Others were committed to re-running the care leaver survey and a small number said they would revisit the self-assessment tool to track their progress.

At the time of completing the evaluation, there were no confirmed plans for a third phase. The LAs, NB team and young people expressed some concerns about embedding the legacy of their work and sustaining the momentum and changes they had achieved. For some, there was uncertainty around whether they would be able to continue to hold

responsibility for the work and create the necessary capacity to do the work. Respondents overwhelmingly felt that one year was not sufficient to embed the NB programme fully and progress the varied work they had identified in work plans.

Conclusion

The key aims of the NB programme were to increase the extent to which young peoples' voice and experiences were utilised by LAs to inform the development and delivery of services for care leavers and to ensure that LAs engaged their strategic leads and wider corporate parents and community to improve the lives of care leavers. At the end of Phase 2, the challenge remained for LAs to further develop their work beyond simply listening to the views of young people towards fully engaging with them and in establishing mechanisms for the LA and their corporate parents to act upon these views.

The evidence gathered showed that the overall reach of the programme was limited to only a proportion of the potential number of care leavers in each LA and generally NB LAs had not yet stretched far enough to engage all necessary partners and the local community. That said, the evaluation found that overall, and within the limited timeframe and resources, there was evidence of impact at both the service level and at the individual level and that participation in the NB programme had brought tangible benefits to most participating LAs.

1. Chapter one. Introduction: background and methodology

This first chapter sets out the background to the New Belongings Programme. It provides an overview of how and why New Belongings came about, its aims and how it was rolled out across participating local authorities. The chapter also briefly describes the independent evaluation aims and the methodological approaches used to gather and analyse the data.

1.1 Why was New Belongings needed?

Historically leaving care provision has been an overlooked area of children's services, with emphasis often placed on child protection and the support young people receive whilst in care (Biehal 1995, Stein 2012) . The New Belongings (NB) programme seeks to address this imbalance by helping local authorities and partner organisations to improve the quality of experience for care leavers and to raise the standards of the services they provide to this group of young people.

Outcomes for many young people leaving care are known to be poor. Research and practice evidence gathered over the past three decades has continued to highlight the considerable disparity in experiences, opportunities and life chances between care leavers as a group and their non-care peers (Biehal et al 1995, Dixon and Stein 2005, Dixon et al 2006, Hannon et al 2010, Stein 2012, Munro and NCAS 2011). The impact of pre-care experiences (the reasons for coming into care), the variable quality of care provision and poor preparation and post-care support creates a legacy of risk and disadvantage that, without effective intervention, can follow young people into adulthood. Whilst for some, being in care and leaving care can be positive experiences, many can struggle to find a stable home-life and career in the early years after care. Wider research and practice evidence on vulnerable groups shows that care leavers tend to be over-represented in marginalised groups and on indicators of social exclusion. They are more likely to leave school with no qualifications (DfE 2013), become involved with the criminal justice system (MoJ 2012), have poorer physical and mental health (Meltzer 2003), and are vulnerable to homelessness (Centrepoint 2010 and Crisis 2011) and unemployment (Wade and Dixon 2006).

Recent research has demonstrated the considerable challenges that young people in and from care continue to face in terms of their social, emotional and economic wellbeing (Dixon and Lee et al 2015). This research concludes that much remains to be done to ensure that children and young people from care have the same support and opportunities to fulfil their potential as any other child would have.

In response to the poor outcomes experienced by care leavers, there has been a raft of legislative developments alongside significant financial investment over recent years. This has aimed to restructure the policy landscape and to improve support for young people leaving care (The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations. Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers 2010; The Care Leaver Strategy 2013 and the 2016 update; Children and Families Act 2014). Despite this, however, there remains considerable variation in support offered between the 152 authorities in England and, at times, within them (Ofsted, 2016).

1.2 What is New Belongings?

New Belongings (NB) was a programme delivered with funding given to the Care Leavers' Foundation by the Department for Education (DfE). The programme supported local authorities (LAs) to improve their leaving care services by refining the design and delivery of services to care leavers across key life areas such as accommodation, education, employment and health and wellbeing. It did this by using the experiences and knowledge of care leavers to inform and shape decisions about service delivery and improvement. The NB project team (see 1.2.2.) described this approach as having '*a unique feature of involving care leavers in the leadership and delivery both nationally and locally.'* (NB facilitator).

The programme began in March 2013 and ran for 18 months until October 2014 (Phase 1) and originally worked with nine LAs. It was then extended for a further 12 months (Phase 2) to run from April 2015 to March 2016. Phase 2 set out to both expand the reach of the programme to a larger number of LAs, as well as to support the original nine authorities to maintain and develop their progress.

The aims of NB Phase two were to:

- increase the extent to which LAs use the experience and wisdom of care leavers to take decisions about the services provided to them
- ensure that LAs engage all services of the authority and its partners in providing excellent services and support to care leavers
- help LAs engage effectively the wider local community in the task of improving the daily lives and life chances of care leavers.

1.2.1 Applying to take part in New Belongings

The project set out a range of minimum expectations that LAs were required to meet. Namely, LAs were invited apply to take part in the programme if they were able to demonstrate in their application that they could meet the following conditions:

- conduct an NB survey with local care leavers to determine the priorities of the project
- commitment to develop a basic plan for the project reflecting the care leaver survey findings delivered by a designated lead
- existence of, or commitment to create, a care leaver forum with a real voice and influence
- personal support of the Chief Executive to ensure co-operation across the authority
- personal support of the Leader to engage local groups and businesses to offer opportunities and support to care leavers
- signed up to the care leaver charter.

A total of 28 LAs across England were a part of Phase 2. This included all but one of the original Phase 1 cohort, who opted to continue the programme. The LAs were then grouped into clusters, as described below.

1.2.2. Delivery of the New Belongings programme

The NB programme was supported by an appointed project team. The Phase 2 team consisted of a project manager and a team of seven ‘facilitators’ and 27 ‘care leaver panellists’. NB facilitators were drawn from government and third sector backgrounds and brought experience of policy and delivery in a range of areas, including employment, education and criminal justice as well as the care sector. The purpose of the facilitator role was to guide, support and help co-ordinate the work within LAs and their clusters.

The facilitators worked alongside a panel of care leaver experts, known as ‘panellists’. These care leavers provided advice and experience to participating LAs and their local care leavers. LAs were encouraged to use the expertise of the panel members assigned to their area to supplement the knowledge and views of their own local care leavers. Care leaver panellists came from a range of backgrounds and a number were experienced in campaigning on care and leaving care issues.

It is important to note that the NB project team was not resourced to provide full-time operational management and support of the programme. In many respects the team operated on a part-time and sometimes pro bono basis.

The NB LAs were grouped into eight clusters. The majority of the clusters were configured based on geography with just one ‘virtual’ cluster. The clusters varied in size, with most having three or more LAs, the largest cluster containing six LAs (see Table 1).

Table 1 Cluster configuration

Number of LAs within the cluster	Number of clusters
2 LAs	3
3 LAs	1
4 LAs	2
5 LAs	1
6 LAs	1
Total	8

Each cluster of LAs worked with a New Belongings team comprising of care leavers from the national panel and one facilitator.

1.2.3 Core elements of New Belongings approach

Those involved in NB were keen to emphasise that the project was '*trying to change a culture, and when you do that you need to consult people who [the] culture affects most deeply, who can help you design responsive services, as opposed to service led, we are saying ask not how your service is run, ask how your children are.* (Facilitator focus group.)

In order to work towards this, LAs were asked to follow the NB methodology that had developed from running Phase 1 of the programme. The programme methodology set out a number of steps for LAs to follow when developing and running the NB programme in their own local areas (see Figure 1).

Although all 28 LAs were asked to use the same approach, the intention was that they developed plans that were tailored to their local context. The core elements were designed to ensure a whole LA approach, i.e. that there was a role for everyone at each level and to seek commitment at each level. Young people's views were central to the overall approach and all elements were expected to link-up.

The main steps, as set out by the NB programme were:

1. undertake a survey of local care leavers to understand priorities for improvement
2. conduct a review of the role and experience of Personal Advisers (PAs);
3. establish a forum of care leavers to help the authority in shaping decisions about changes to services
4. prepare a plan for improvement based on understanding of local needs gained from the three previous steps

5. obtain the support of senior leadership, especially the Chief Executive and political leadership, to help join up the services of the council and its partners
6. use the influence of the political leadership of the council to engage the wider community to enable care leavers to participate fully in their communities. (See New Belongings Guide 2016 for more detail.)

Although LAs received support from the central team (facilitators and panellists), participation in the NB programme did not come with additional resources for the LAs.

Figure 1 The NB methodology

1.2.4 New Belongings - developing a 'Gold Standard' service

The concept of a 'gold standard' for leaving care services was conceived during Phase 1 of the NB programme. Indeed the Phase 1 evaluation report concluded that the creation of some sort of standards would be beneficial in guiding both service improvement and inspection work (Lindsay and Stein, 2014).

A challenge for NB during Phase 2 was, therefore, to develop this idea and explore how to define a gold standard and understand what LAs would need to do to achieve it. In drawing upon the learning from the first stage of the programme, NB identified ten gold standard areas. These areas represented different aspects of leaving care with the quality of care leavers' experiences at the centre. As outlined by the NB team, the NB gold standard was characterised by whether care leavers feel '*cared for; 'cared about'; and 'able to care for themselves*'. For example:

- 'Cared for' is about meeting the needs of care leavers, as younger and older adults, and includes: being educated to their potential, being helped into work

being healthy, living in suitable and affordable housing, having an adequate level of income, and being informed and supported

- 'Cared about' is about an individual care leaver knowing that there are people on whom he or she can count for emotional support help and advice when they need it, both now and into the future
- 'Able to care for themselves' is about being able to manage day-to-day life and being capable of taking decisions. Seeking to build the resilience to cope with demanding situations needs to be combined with access to support when it is needed later in life. (See New Belongings Guide, 2016.)

The evaluation team utilised the 10 areas as a basis for a more detailed self-assessment framework, aimed at helping services to understand how they were performing in relation to the gold standard. This is explained further in Chapter two and Appendix 1 and a copy of the self-assessment is available in Appendix 2.

1.3 Evaluation aims and methodology

The independent evaluation, commissioned by the Department of Education (DfE), began in May 2015 and focused on Phase 2 of the NB programme. The main aims were to:

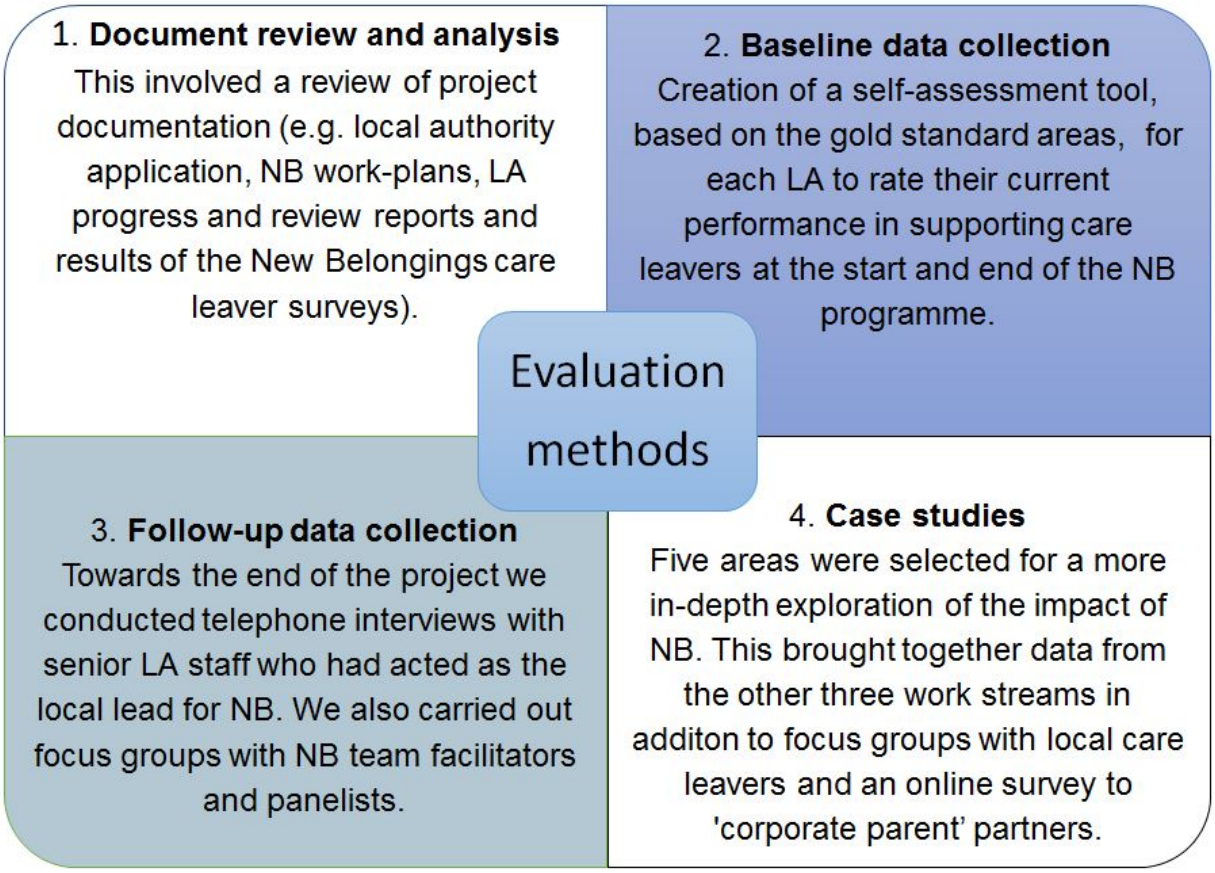
1. describe the different components of the NB approach
2. understand what was needed to implement a successful NB approach
3. explore if, and how, the NB approach impacted on the experiences of care leavers and the delivery of services.

The evaluation brief requested a '*light touch'* approach, involving mainly desk based data collection for exploring how the NB model was working in practice. The evaluation team, however, expanded the approach to enable the collection of primary data from the key stakeholders including interviews and focus groups with care leavers (both locally and on the NB panel) and national and local staff acting as NB leads. A mixed-methods approach comprising four interconnected work streams was undertaken. This involved both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. Qualitative data was subject to a thematic review. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to collate and analyse quantitative data, which related to the self-assessment tool results. Due to the small sample size (28 LAs) and relatively low response rates, statistical analysis were limited to basic descriptive methods only.

The design of the evaluation aimed to minimise the impact on the participating LAs by aligning data collection, where possible, with work already being undertaken and data

already being gathered (e.g. secondary analysis of the care leaver surveys and review of relevant NB and LA documentation). Figure 2 shows the different work streams and activities and Appendix 1 describes the methodology in more detail.

Figure 2 New Belongings evaluation work streams



The evaluation was a relatively small light touch enquiry, designed to offer broad insights into the experiences of undertaking the NB programme across the 28 LAs. This report does not, therefore, provide an account of all activities carried out by each LA during their year in the NB programme. Rather it illustrates some of the types of activity carried out. More detailed information on the different programme activities is contained within the NB programme reports and website (See New Belongings Guide, 2016 and Care Leavers' Foundation website.

Limitations to the evaluation

Overall, there was a good level of engagement with the evaluation and it has produced a considerable body of data. There are, however, some limitations in the data collected and the subsequent findings.

Participation in the evaluation was voluntary and, as such, this has meant that it was not possible to capture the perspectives of key representatives from all the LAs involved with the NB programme. This has raised the potential of bias within the sample. Since the full range of views and experiences are not represented there is a possibility that those who were more fully engaged with the programme might have been more likely to respond to requests for data. In addition, it is important to note that much of the information contained in this report comes from self-reports of progress, such as NB reports, LA progress reviews and the self-assessment tool. These have been taken at face value and have not been subject to independent scrutiny.

A further limitation is the relatively low response rates to some data collection instruments (e.g. self-assessment tool and survey of corporate parents (CP).

A final limitation was related to the timing of the evaluation. As discussed later in this report, one year is insufficient for LAs to fully implement all the components of the programme, to action the work-plans, and to deliver on their aims to achieve service improvement. It was very much about getting things underway and to make steps to identify work for longer term service improvement. The evaluation ran alongside the one year timescale of the NB Phase 2. Whilst it was able to capture the journey through the early stages of NB it was, in many cases, too soon to capture much more than emerging evidence of change and impact. As is commonly the case when introducing new approaches into relatively large environments, change tends to take time and is often only visible and measurable once the work has had time to bed-in fully.[4]

1.4 Summary points for chapter one

- New Belongings came about in response to continuing evidence of poor outcomes for many young people leaving care and the variability of service provision to support them
- Funded by the DfE, the first phase ran for 18 months from March 2013 and was followed by a one year Phase 2 programme, which ended in March 2016
- The key aims of the NB programme were to increase the extent to which young people's voices and experiences were utilised by LAs to inform the development and delivery of services for care leavers and to ensure that LAs engaged their strategic leaders and the wider corporate parents and community to improve the lives of care leavers
- Twenty-eight LAs took part in the Phase 2 NB programme and they formed eight area clusters. All were required to demonstrate commitment to the key

[4] The growing field of implementation science, which focuses primarily on the implementation of interventions and evidence based programmes, highlights the importance of realistic timescales, noting *'transferring and maintaining programs in real world settings is a long and complex* process'. See Franks and Schroeder (2013)

components of the NB model, which included buy-in from the Chief Executive and carrying out a local care leaver survey

- LAs were supported by the NB team which included an overall project manager and a facilitator and care leaver panellist who were assigned to the LA and their cluste
- The independent evaluation was commissioned by the DfE and focused on how Phase 2 of the NB programme was operating in LAs
- The mixed methods approach included the development of as self-assessment framework for LAs to assess their own service at the start and end of the programme, secondary analysis of the LAs care leavers survey results, and interviews with NB and LA staff leads. Five case study areas were selected for more detailed exploration and involved focus groups with young people and an online survey of the wider group of corporate parents to explore their perceptions of support for care leavers in their services

2. Chapter two. Starting points: local authorities and the New Belongings programme

This chapter focuses on the characteristics of the LAs and how they were doing in terms of their leaving care provision towards the start of the NB programme. Data was drawn from the results of the care leaver surveys that were conducted by each of the NB LAs, the self-assessment framework tool that was distributed in the early months of the programme, and a review of local and national documentation and statistics, including LA, NB and Ofsted reports.

2.1 The New Belongings local authorities

The NB programme involved almost one-fifth (18%) of English LAs. A review of local and national documents relating to LA performance and characteristics suggested that they were broadly representative of the national picture. National data sets and reports showed that the participating LAs reflected diversity in in terms of geography, type of council (including unitary, metropolitan, county councils and London boroughs) and varied in the size of the local care leaver population (n=155 to 866 including eligible relevant and former relevant young people, DfE, 2015), outcome indicators and the style of service delivery models. For example, available data on service structure showed that one-third of LAs had a through care model, 16+ and 18+ models accounted for 11% each and 4% were operating a 'social work practice model', the rest describing their service model as 'other'.

The NB LAs also varied in terms of performance levels, as indicted by their Ofsted inspection results. As shown in Table 2, just under one-quarter (22%) were rated as good or outstanding for there care leaver service, and almost one-half rated as requiring improvement or inadequate. In comparision to national level ofsted inspection results, this demonstrated a good level of representativeness.

Table 2 Ofsted Ratings

Inspection outcome	NB LAs	England national %
Outstanding	1 (4%)	2 (1%)
Good	5 (18%)	31 (20%)
Requires improvement	10 (36%)	49 (32%)
Inadequate	3 (11%)	12 (8%)
Not yet inspected	9 (32%)	58 (38%)
Total	**28**	**152**

Source: Ofsted 2016

Whilst such data was useful to help the evaluation understand and contextualise the LAs, it did not provide sufficient information to accurately understand the LAs varying starting points or their particular strengths and areas requiring improvements. A key task for the evaluation, therefore, was to establish a system for measuring baseline performance and progress for the LAs so that the potential impact of the work undertaken during the one year NB programme could be explored. To do this, the evaluation:

- collated and carried out a secondary analysis of the results of the NB care leaver surveys to understand more about the feelings and experiences of young people in the LAs
- created a self-assessment tool for LAs to rate their performance towards the start of the NB programme and a shorter version for assessing progress toward the end of the programme.

An overview of the data and key findings from these baseline indicators is discussed below.

2.2 The New Belongings care leaver survey

Each LA was required to undertake a survey of their care leavers to capture their views and experiences of leaving care. The survey was created by the NB team for use with Phase 1 LAs. Despite some criticism of the original survey questions raised during the first evaluation (Lindsay and Stein, 2014) and suggested amendments to questions propsed by the current evaluation team, the NB team were keen that the new survey remained largely unchanged in order to replicate and ensure consistency with the Phase 1 survey.

The main aim of the survey was to enable young people to voice their views and concerns about what works and what needs to change in order to improve leaving care support within their LA. Findings from the care leaver survey were fundamental to the development of each LA's own work-plan and were used to inform the identification of priority areas of focus. To reach as wide a group as possible, the actual method and delivery of the survey was left to LA discretion. However, they were encouraged to think creatively in how they gathered young people's views. Instructions for completion noted *'the New Belongings approach encourages flexibility in distributing the survey so it may not be appropriate to use the questionnaire document in all cases'* (NB survey completion instructions).

Data submitted to the evaluation suggested that most of the LAs used a traditional paper survey method. However, some harnessed the power of social media to encourage participation and gathered responses via email and texts. Others offered the chance to provide information face to face via drop in sessions and groups discussions.

The surveys were anonymous. They required data on basic characteristics only (age, stage of leaving care and gender) and they were returned directly to the LAs to allow them to undertake their own analyes

Although the evaluation team was not directly involved in the main analysis of the survey data, support was offered to LAs to assist with the analysis task. An analysis framework was created by the evaluation team and was circulated to those that requested support.

Summary data and findings from each LA's analysed surveys were then sent to the evaluation team. This was collated and combined into one dataset and subject to secondary analysis to extrapolate common themes and aggregate experiences across the whole NB programme. Information requested included information on survey participants (e.g. number of care leavers surveyed and the response rate) together with the survey findings.

2.2.1 Survey Responses

The evaluation team received the survey responses from 23 out of 28 LAs (82%). Some had used a variation of the survey. For example, one LA (LA 14) aligned it to an existing local 'survey' whilst another incorporated the survey questions into an existing local data gathering event for children in and leaving care (LA 16). The format of data received varied and included raw data, summarised findings and reports.

Data was received for 792 young people who participated in the surveys. Incomplete information made it difficult to assess the response rates to the surveys[5] and the characteristics of respondents. Available information indicated that just over one-quarter (27%) of young people contacted for their views contributed to the all the LA surveys.

Available data also suggested that, at an LA level, respondents represented from between 4% and 36% of the local care leaver populations. In terms of the characteristics of respondents, data was available for one-third of the respondents only and showed that slightly more young women took part (184 females and 126 males) and that age ranged from 15 to 25 years (see Table 3).

[5] Not all local authorities provided information on their care leaver population at the time of the survey or the number of young people invited to participate or the number of returns.

Table 3 Response rate to care leaver survey across 23 local authorities

Number of CL returns	Local survey response rate* for	Number of CL in LA	Returns as % of local care leaver population
13	?	194	7%
50	?	?	?
60	?	?	?
12	?	?	?
53	?	146	36%
9	?	227	4%
37	?	791	5%
81	?	248	33%
29	?	414	7%
30	?	260	12%
101	?	866	12%
106	17%	?	?
45	?	280	16%
28	27%	?	?
26	?	?	?
?	?	447	0
9	?	202	4%
27	?	542	5%
?	?	?	?
15	?	232	6%
11	?	?	?
14	?	155	9%
36	16%	386	9%

* Rate based on the number of questionniares sent out as reported by each LA. ? indicates missing data.

The information suggests that overall response rates were very low. Despite having the opportunity to utilise more flexible and imaginative ways of hearing from young people, the use of more traditional survey methods, such as paper questionnaires instead of young person friendly approaches, will have impacted on take-up. This raises the issue of how services can best facilitate fuller participation and empower young people to share their views, particularly as vulnerable groups, such as care leavers, are often considered

hard to reach. The ways in which participation in the care leaver surveys and consultations might be improved are discussed further in Chapter three.

Evidence from the interviews with LAs at follow-up and a review of the NB documentation showed that some LAs had continued to canvas young people's views throughout the programme timescale and had begun to diversify the ways in which they did this.

> *'Work to identify and understand care leavers' views continued after the care leaver survey and led to various methods of follow up consultation with care leavers on the issues identified. This included attending care leavers groups and gathering further views of young people. The authority also produced a care leavers' film, branded under New Belongings, which gave young people an open platform to voice their views on film in response to the top issues raised'.* (LA final review report)

2.2.2 The views of young people leaving care

> *'Start listening to the people you are meant to be helping….management need to be involved more, stop sitting behind a desk.*' (YP LA 26)

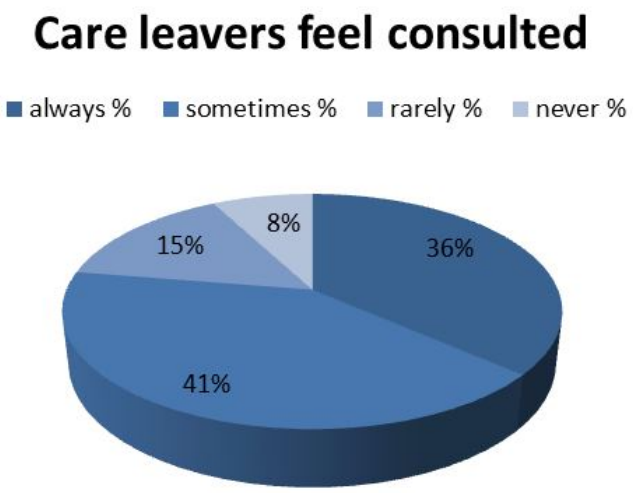
As outlined earlier, the findings from the care leaver surveys were the starting point for the LAs on their journey to implementing the core components of the NB approach.

The care leavers' survey comprised 12 questions that explored young people's views on the best and worst aspects of leaving care. It also asked for perspectives on what might have improved their experiences and what advice they would offer to young people leaving care in the future. The surveys also served to establish a baseline in terms of the extent to which care leavers felt they were consulted in their LAs. Results from the surveys were provided in a range of formats including raw data and summarised analyses. A number of key themes arose across the responses.

Being consulted and listened to

Young people were asked 'do you feel that you have been heard and your views considered even if your lead professionals didn't always agree? Data from 14 of the LAs that returned their survey results suggested that 'overall most young people (77%) felt that their views were being heard and considered at least some of the time (see Figure 3).'just under one-quarter (23%), however, felt that this was not the case for them. In some cases, young people felt that they had been given opportunities to have their say but that people didn't always understand how to respond, '*yes I feel I was heard but sometimes felt like they were just listening….instead of understanding where I came from and putting themselves in my shoes*'. (YP LA 3)

Figure 3 Being consulted and listened to



Leaving care

Young people were asked to identify the three best and the three worst things about leaving care. As is often the case when exploring positives and negatives, the issues identified tended to be different sides of the same coin and the determining factor was generally located in how things had been handled. Several messages emerged from care leavers' views and experiences:

- Independence

For many, the best thing about leaving care was gaining '*independence'* and there was a clear sense that the care leaver group had generally welcomed the opportunity to strike out on their own, get their '*own place'* and embark upon the journey to independent adulthood. Independence came in many forms and included financial *(*such as managing their own money), social (such as seeing friends and family whenever they wanted), '*not having a curfew,*' and getting their own home where they could be themselves and furnish and decorate it as they wish. It was also about having the autonomy to make decisions and choices about their future and about the types of activities they engaged in, which, for some, included experimenting with alcohol or drugs. In many respects, therefore, this resembled the usual transitional experiences of young adults. The concept of '*freedom*' was very much apparent in responses. Importantly for care leavers in the survey, however, this was often expressed in terms of freedom from '*service involvement*', '*not being in care anymore'*, '*not having a social worker'*, *'not attending reviews*' and not being told what to do. A small number of responses indicated that leaving care represented a turning point or a chance to put the past behind them and to

'start again', 'free from stigma' or 'not be tarnished with the brush of being in care' (YP LA 10).

For some young people, however, independence was met with a feeling of trepidation and brought with it some of the negative aspects of leaving care. Young people talked of the '*stress of being independent*', '*the volume of what [young person] has to understand'*, the responsibilities of having to shop, cook, and '*having 'household chores'* to do. Worries about debt, managing finances and budgeting were common concerns for care leavers. Young people also felt that independence brought a degree of *'uncertainty about the future*' and, whilst for some a move away from services had been seen as a positive aspect of leaving care, for many others, having less support and input from their social or leaving care worker was considered amongst the worst aspects, which had left some '*not knowing who to turn to for help*' and '*like there is no safety net'* (YP LA 12).

- Loneliness and isolation

Amongst the most difficult aspects of leaving care for the young people responding to the surveys were feelings of loneliness and isolation. Care leavers wrote about being alone with no family or friends to turn to '*there's no one there'* (YP LA 9)' and of moving away and losing contact with carers, support workers and friends. Young people talked of '*missing staff and carers the worst was, I don't know I actually miss them, I can't believe it just happened quickly I'm 21' (*YP LA 8) and the difficulties of meeting new people and finding new support networks *'don't see anyone, [I'm] in my flat alone'* (YP LA 22). Some respondents commented on the need for greater attention to this issue as part of the preparation process, either by hearing from others who had experienced moving on from care or by getting support to address emotional needs before leaving care '*sort counselling to deal [with] issues before living along [sic]*'' (YP LA 20).

There was also a sense that young people felt abandoned '*feeling I'm not wanted anymore*' (YP LA 26). '*I felt abandoned, I got put into [my accommodation] and never heard from again*' (YP LA 8) and were being left to cope on their own. For one young person the worst part of leaving care was '*the fear of having to face things alone, suddenly all the support you were familiar with has gone'* (YP LA 22).

- Support

Closely linked to the issues raised above was the continued need for formal and informal support. Support from services, staff, carers and friends were identified as some of the best parts of leaving care, '*having an allocated person that I can feel I can talk to and who understands me and listens to what I say and sees me regularly'* (YP LA 1). As well as emotional support, young people valued having access to financial, housing and education and employment support. Some commented on the need for leaving care support to begin earlier as part of the preparation process 'the *support only came into play once I had left care – it needs to start sooner'.* (YP LA 12).

However, striking out '*on your own'* for some meant losing the support networks that had evolved during care. This was commonly identified amongst the worst aspects of leaving care, feeling cast adrift to '*fend for myself*'. For some young people, approaching the transition from care was akin to approaching a cliff edge of support.

> *'[the worst thing is] knowing that you're going to be totally on your own when you turn 21 and that there is no help or support, not like people with families who have most of their support for the rest of their lives'* (YP LA 1)

> '*that I will leave the care service totally and have no support or somewhere to go to talk things through'* (YP LA 1).

Such concerns demonstrate a need for planning of future support to form part of more effective individual preparation and post care planning assessments as well as wider service developments to create opportunities for care leavers to access support.

2.2.3 What advice did care leavers offer to young people in care?

The value of peer learning was a common thread running through the NB programme. In the LA care leaver surveys this involved drawing upon the experiences of older care leavers to offer information and guidance. Care leavers participating in the surveys were asked what advice they would offer to young people who were preparing to move on from care.

The overarching message to peers was to take every opportunity to prepare well and in good time '*start cooking and learning to budget and other independent skills as soon as you can and before you're 17''* (YP LA 1). Many emphasised the importance of acquiring the practical and emotional skills necessary for looking after themselves and managing a home, whether cooking, cleaning, DIY, managing finance and becoming accustomed to living alone. Within this was a clear message to carers and lead professionals that developing such skills should be '*incremental*' (YP LA 10) and not '*a rush*' (YP LA 18). The need for a more gradual and normative experience of developing such life skills has been a central message within past research and policy on preparation and planning (Biehal et al 1995, Dixon and Stein 2005) and yet some young people continued to experience nothing, or a last minute crash course, something that was '*sprung on us'* (YP LA 8).

In addition to recommending earlier and more realistic planning and preparation for independent living, some young people talked about the benefits of having opportunities to test out living alone, having a '*rehearsal'* (YP LA 12) or a '*trial to do stuff by yourself but with support*' (YP LA 22).

> *'Take me down to where I was moving to a couple of days before I moved out and let me stay there for the night alone so I know if I would have managed'* (YP LA 3).

Taster or training flats were frequently mentioned by young people in their survey responses as a way of becoming more accustomed to the responsibilities of managing their own home and experiencing living on their own. This was considered particularly important for young people leaving residential care, for whom the transition from communal living to living on their own could be keenly felt '*when you have lived with others [young people] sometimes being alone is hard*' (YP LA 1). Some care leavers recommended '*practising*' independent living skills whilst living with carers by attending '*courses*' (YP LA 20) on cooking and budgeting.

Some requested more opportunities to practise skills within their foster home, by being given tasks and being trusted and encouraged to cook, buy food, do their own washing '*having someone clean my room for me did not prepare me for independence'* (YP LA 18).

Money management seemed high on the agenda and care leavers advised on saving up prior to leaving care. Better preparation encompassed the need for earlier discussions around accommodation options and in accessing work experience and careers advice. For one young person getting things in place before they reached the age of leaving care at 18 included '*not getting a letter telling me to go to the job centre on my birthday'* (YP LA 8). Whilst providing prudent advice for their peers, the participating care leavers highlighted the need for their corporate parents to provide better quality and more realistic and timely preparation.

By bringing together the individual LA data and thereby drawing on the views of almost 800 care leavers, the care leaver surveys represented a powerful voice and presented important messages for services. Young people's need for increasing independence and yet the sense of loneliness and feeling abandoned captured the dilemma facing LAs in how they support young people during their journeys to adulthood. Young people clearly want the freedom and opportunities to make their own way in life after care and to take decisions and risks, but this needs to happen within an environment of continuing, flexible and age-appropriate support. Facilitating independence and support is a difficult balancing act that LAs and the wider corporate parenting network need to master in order to provide their care leavers with a positive transition to adulthood.

2.3 Developing the leaving care service self-assessment tool

A self-assessment tool was created by the evaluation team to embed a monitoring framework within the NB sites that would enable them to assess and benchmark their leaving care service at the start and end of the one year programme.

As its basis, the self-assessment tool comprised the 10 gold standard areas developed by the NB programme.

Figure 4 The NB gold standard areas

The New Belongings Gold Standard Areas

1. Services responsive to views of care leavers (as individuals and a group);
2. Being informed and supported;
3. Educated (to their potential);
4. Helped into work (employability);
5. Having good health and wellbeing;
6. Being in safe and settled accommodation;
7. Having an adequate level of income;
8. Having people to count on for emotional support;
9. Being able to manage day to day life;
10. Services that are used by more vulnerable care leavers such as disabled care leavers, young people who have been homeless, in the youth justice system, living out of area and unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

Using this as a skeleton framework, the evaluation team created a range of statement indicators (items) to include within each of the 10 gold standard areas. These items were based on evidence from a range of existing research and policy including the principles enshrined in the Care Leaver Charter and the cross departmental Access all Areas.[6] They were used to help understand and describe what would be expected of a gold standard offer to care leavers. For example, gold standard area 1 contained nine items representing different components of a good service for promoting the views of care leavers (see Figure 5).

[6] Access All Areas 2012 was an initiative to promote more joined up working on policies affecting care leavers and encouraging Government Departments to remove the unintended consequences of a fragmented approach to policy. The Care Leavers Charter 2014 sets out a set of promises and principles designed to raise expectation, aspiration and understanding of what care leavers need and what the government and local authorities should do to be good Corporate Parents. See. Access All Areas and the Care Leavers' Charter.

Figure 5 Example of self-assessment tool

1. Services responsive to the views of care leavers (as individuals and a group).

Gold Standard Area 1	*Thinking about how your leaving care service is operating at present, please indicate how far you agree with the following statements:* please add an 'x'	Agree at present	Mostly agree	Mostly disagree	Disagree at present	Feel free to include evidence (e.g. comments, actions or links to supporting information). This might help you when reflecting back on your assessment.
Services responsive to views of care leavers	a. There is clear commitment from strategic leaders to improving leaving care services.					
	b. Care leavers are pivotal in shaping services and influencing how support is delivered.					
	c. We have various mechanisms for seeking feedback from care leavers about the support they receive.					
	d. There are opportunities for elected members to meet, listen to and work alongside care leavers.					
	e. Our children in care council (or similar) has strong care leaver representation and we have examples of the impact they have made.					
	f. Our local authority has ways to celebrate care leavers' achievements.					
	g. Where complaints have identified deficiencies or gaps in services this has led to positive changes in delivery of service.					
	h. Care leavers are involved in the recruitment, selection and training of staff and carers.					
	i. We have robust management information, which meets Annex A. (Ofsted) and SSDA903 return requirements and allows managers to track individual young people and also identify collective needs and concerns.					
Overall Rating	We would rate our current performance in ensuring services are *responsive to views of care leavers* as:		**/ 10**	[score out of 10]		

A copy of the full self-assessment framework is included within Appendix 2.

LAs were asked to realistically and honestly appraise their current performance in the 10 areas, providing supporting evidence where possible. In doing so, the tool provided an opportunity to help LAs to identify priority areas where NB and each LA could work together to inform the work plan, identify actions and improve their offer to care leavers.

At the same time, the tool provided a snap shot baseline assessment of how LAs rated their current performance in supporting care leavers at the start of the NB programme. It also offered scope to monitor ongoing progress by subsequent reviews and rounds of completion.

Towards the end of the NB programme the evaluation requested that LAs reflected back on their baseline scores and considered their current performance as part of an end of project review to map the journeys travelled.

2.4 Self-assessment in the New Belongings local authorities

The self-assessment tool was sent to all 28 NB LAs in the early months of joining the programme. Instructions for completion encouraged LAs to use consultation exercises with other colleagues and with care leavers groups (see Appendix 2).

Most of the LAs took up the opportunity to assess their leaving care service. At baseline 68% (19) returned completed measures. These responding LAs were sent the self-assessment follow-up tool, four to six months later, and asked to indicate their current performance in relation to their baseline scores. Just over half (53%) completed the assessment a second time.

Table 4 Self-Assessment Response Rates

Time point	Sent out	Returned	Response Rate %
Baseline	28	19	68%
Follow-up	19	10	53%

Feedback from LAs on the self-assessment tool suggested that it had proved a useful process for helping to consolidate views on performance and identify areas for further development:

> *'we wished we'd had the self-evaluation exercise at the beginning of the project before we did our action plan. We are still going through it and it has made us think about what we are doing'* (Manager).

> *'I found the completion of the self-assessment helpful on three main levels: 1. It made you think about where you are now and challenged thinking with the scoring and reflection on evidence to justify the scoring; 2. It assisted to highlight work areas that needed more focus and development looking holistically at service delivery and more importantly user experience and feedback; 3. Sharing with partners our self-assessment for joint ownership about where we are and what more we needed to work on together'.* (Manager)

The self-assessment appeared to bring added value when completed collectively because this opened up channels of discussion on performance with colleagues and partner services:

> *'[It was] helpful as it gets you to think and because we completed it separately and then together. I was particularly pleased because when we came together we were only about 3 or 4 points out from each other after we had scored it. Made us think about what we do and also what we still need to do so in that respect it has been really useful'. (Manager)*

'I found the self-assessment to be a useful exercise. I ran it past my Director of Children's services and she agreed and actually reduced the score on consultation by corporate parents – so I believe it's a realistic self-assessment'. (Manager)

Of course there was the recognition that the self-assessment tool was very much the first step in what could be a long and complicated process.

'When it comes to consultation I find that everyone agrees it's an excellent thing to carry out but then making it work in a way that is meaningful and produces any change is a difficult task'. (LA 12)

2.4.1 Assessing leaving care services – the gold standard

Analysis of the scores from the NB LAs provided an opportunity to look at their self-assessed strengths and areas for development. In looking at what LAs had identified towards the start of the programme as being the areas they needed to improve in we were able to follow the actions they had taken to chart any progress or challenges.

The relatively low response rate, particularly at follow-up imposed limitations on statistical analysis. Nevertheless, some emerging trends were present within the data.

As discussed in the previous section, the gold standard areas were broken down into statements indicators (items), created by the evaluation team to enable respondents to assess their progress across the various components that contribute to a gold standard service. Statistical tests were carried out to test the reliability of the measure as a whole and indicated a good degree of internal consistency between the items within each of the gold standard areas. This gave some confidence that that items worked well together and that the tool was a reliable measure.[7]

The number of items varied per gold standard area, from seven to 13 items and totalled 98 across the whole self-assessment tool. By scoring each item within each gold standard area, respondents were encouraged to breakdown their performance according to the specific components to provide a more considered and nuanced appraisal.

Respondents were asked to indicate how far they agreed with each item using a four-point scale:

agree at present (4)	mostly agree (3)	mostly disagree (2)	disagree at present (1)

[7] With the exception of area 1, which scored 0.6 all gold standard area returned a Cronbach alpha score of 0.7 or above. Cronbach's alpha is used to indicate how closely related a set of items or statements are as a group i.e. internal consistency. A score of 0.7 or above is generally considered acceptable, with lower scores indicating a less reliable scale.

These scores were calculated to provide a score per gold standard area (cumulative score), which were in turn summed to provide an overall local authority score across all 10 gold standard areas.

In addition to the cumulative score, respondents were asked to give themselves an overall rating out of 10 for each of the gold standard areas (self-score). The self- score provided a more instinctive view of their overall performance.

These different approaches to capturing performance were intended to complement each other. However, in a small number of cases, there was a notable difference between cumulative scores and self-scores. Although it was not possible to explore the reasons for this, it might suggest some divergence in where LAs saw themselves and where they actually were in terms of their cumulative ratings.

2.4.2 Performance within the 10 gold standard areas

To get a sense of which gold standard areas were being delivered well at baseline and which were perceived as areas of weakness, the average score (mean) for each gold standard area was calculated. This was used to rank the gold standard areas in order of performance across all responding LAs (n=19), with higher average scores indicating better overall performance.

Table 5 Gold standard areas in order of performance at baseline (n=19)

Rank	Gold standard area:	Mean (average scores)
1.	Area 7. Having an adequate level of income	7.42
2.	Area 3. Young people educated to their potential	7.32
3.	Area 8. Having people to count on for emotional support	7.31
4.	Area 4. Young people are helped into work (employability)	7.26
5.	Area 10. Services that are used by vulnerable care leavers	7.26
6.	Area 1. Service responsive to views of care leavers	7.11
7.	Area 6. In safe and settled accommodation	7.05
8.	Area 2. Being informed and supported	6.84
9.	Area 9. Being able to manage day to day life	6.73
10.	Area 5. Having good health and wellbeing	6.26

As table 5 shows, the areas that the NB LAs as a group were performing best in were areas 7 ‘having an adequate level of income’ and 3 ‘young people educated to their potential’. This might reflect the fact that the statutory duties related to these particular areas of practice were more embedded. The areas with poorer performance related to ensuring that all ‘care leavers were able to manage their day to day life’ and delivering support to address ‘health and wellbeing’ needs.

This could suggest a lack of confidence in services focussed on good quality preparation and planning that aim to ensure that young people are practically and emotional equipped to cope with independent adult living. It could also reflect acknowledgement within the sector and in research that health and wellbeing support continues to represent a service gap for care leavers (Meltzer 2003, Broad 2005 and Dixon 2008).

These findings resonate with those revealed by care leavers though the NB care leaver surveys. Many respondents highlighted that these were significant issues for young people when leaving care and they emphasised the importance of both better preparation and addressing the causes of loneliness and isolation. In bringing together the views of

young people and the professionals supporting them, there was a strong consensus on the need for improved systems and approaches for meeting the practical, emotional and overall wellbeing needs of children and young people in and leaving care.

To gain a more detailed understanding of which components within each gold standard area were being delivered well and which required most attention, a similar process of analysis was carried out on all 98 items. As outlined above, each item was scored from one to four. Taking the average score (mean) generated from the 19 responding LAs for each item, tables showing the top 10 performing gold standard items and the bottom 10 were created. Scores closest to four indicated a more positive response (e.g. agree with item) whilst those closer to one indicated a negative response (e.g. disagree with item).

Table 6 Top 10 items at baseline ranked highest to lowest

Rank	Top 10 Gold standard items	Mean (average scores
1.	Area 8 B – All care leavers have a named allocated worker	3.842
2.	Area 7 D – Care leavers receive a 'setting up home' allowance that is sufficient to ensure they have all the essentials they need	3.737
3.	Area 1 A. - There is clear commitment from strategic leaders to improving leaving care services	3.684
4.	Area 7 A - Our local authority has in place clear written policies and procedures on the financial assistance available to care leavers	3.632
5.	Area 8 A - Care leavers are supported to maintain relationships that are significant to them (e.g. with birth parents, siblings, former carers)	3.632
6.	Area 8 E - We visit care leavers regularly and when they ask	3.632
7.	Area 6 E - Our housing allocation policy prioritises care leavers	3.611
8.	Area 8 C - We have good support in place for care leavers who return home	3.579
9.	Area 8 D - Our local authority is more than the resources we provide, we are a source of social and emotional support for care leavers	3.579
10.	Area 8 - Our local authority is proactive in keeping in touch with all care leavers and we have a very low proportion with whom we are not in touch	3.579

Table 7 Lowest scoring 10 items at baseline ranked highest to lowest

Rank	10 Lowest scoring Gold standard items (n=98):	Mean (average scores
89	Area 6 D - All relevant services and stakeholders (including young people) have contributed to a detailed accommodation needs analysis	2.500
90	Area 9 F - Generally young people report that they find pathway planning helpful in supporting them day to day	2.474
91	Area 5 G - We have robust systems in place to help care leavers to recover and heal from past harm and to promote resilience and emotional wellbeing	2.444
93	Area 3 C - Our virtual school head's takes responsibility for maximising the learning opportunities for all care leavers up to 25	2.421
92	Area 8 J - Our leaving care service operates from a venue which encourages care leavers to drop in and attend activities	2.421
94	Area 5 J - Feedback from care leavers shows that they are satisfied with the support they receive to meet their health and wellbeing needs.	2.412
95	Area 5 I - Joint protocols are in place to provide support for those care leavers transferring to adult services	2.316
96	Area 2 F - We have developed a range of social media platforms to engage and inform care leavers	2.263
97	Area 9 D - Our preparation support is designed and run either by, or with, young people who have experience of leaving care	2.105
98	Area 6 L - Staying Put in residential care is available in our authority	1.737

This analysis again showed that the components of service provision (or items) that the NB LAs considered to be in place most strongly were those in which there was a statutory responsibility (see table 6). For example, they included having a named allocated workerstrategic lead and a sufficient 'setting up home' allowance being available. LAs also felt that support with relationships and with elements of social and emotional needs were in place and operating at local level.

The items that scored lowest varied across the gold standard areas (see table 7). Some related to accommodation needs, both in terms of assessments and addressing opportunities for young people to delay moving from their residential home. Provision for addressing the health and wellbeing needs (area 5) featured prominently within the areas requiring attention, such as having systems for supporting health and wellbeing needs including access to adult services where needed. The item with the lowest score,

indicating little or no work to date across the LAs, was the availability of 'staying put in residential care'.

2.4.3 Local authority performance at baseline

Data gathered from the 19 LAs that completed the self-assessment tool at baseline were used to explore which LAs were doing well and which were struggling to meet the benchmark of a gold standard service. A variable was constructed by summing the scores for all 98 items and banding them according to three categories. The maximum score per item was four (agree at present) giving a total possible score of 392. The bands are outlined in table 8 below.

Table 8 Performance categories

	Category	Scoring parameters	Description
1	Good performance	Scoring 392 - 294	local authority mostly in agreement with every statement (e.g. 4 or 3)
2	Ok performance	Scoring 293 -197	local authority mixed responses
3	Poor performance	Scoring 196 - 1	local authority disagreed with every statement (e.g. 2 or 1).

All responding LAs fell into the top two constructed performance categories. 47% (9) were classed as good and 53% (10) were classed as doing ok in terms of their performance.[8]

As indicated earlier, when the ranked self-scores given by LAs were compared to the ranked cumulative scores given by them there was little or no difference for most, though for three LAs there were noticeable discrepancies. For example, LA 10 was ranked fourth highest on their self-scores but tenth place on their cumulative score and similarly LA 6 was ranked eighth place on their self- score and thirteenth on their cumulative score. This suggests that these LAs considered themselves to be doing slightly better overall (as revealed by their 0 to 10 overall rating for a given gold standard area) than their responses to individual items actually indicated.

[8] Those in category one included LAs 16, 20, 25, 15, 7, 17, 12, 13 and 26 in order of the highest scoring first. Those rated as ok included 10, 1, 3, 6, 27, 4, 14, 18, 11 and 19, scoring the lowest.

2.5 Young people's views of the gold standard

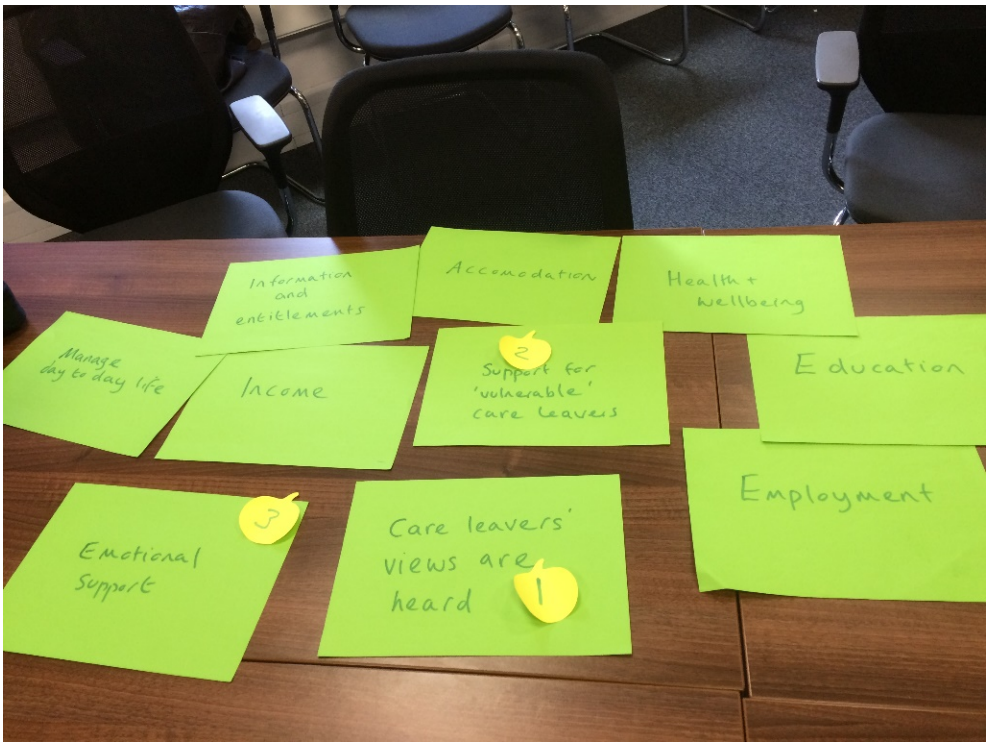
The self-assessment tool was not tested with young people, however, the completion instructions suggested that LAs might like to consult with young people when rating their leaving care service's performance across the 10 gold standard areas. Only one LA reported that they had involved care leavers in completing or reviewing responses to the self-assessment, '*completed by information given from a team managers day, feedback from care leavers group, meetings with…virtual school and housing'* (LA11). A further two intended to share it with care leavers for comment at a later date.

A future task for LAs and the evaluation team in refining the the gold standard and the self-assessment tool is to consult with care leavers to test whether they adequately reflect the different elements of their lives and the support they need.

To enable young people to have a chance to identify their own priorities within the gold standard areas for their local service, young people taking part in case study focus groups took part in a brief service review exercise.

The groups were given 10 topic cards representing each of the 10 gold standard areas e.g.' Area 4. Young people are helped into work (employability)'. They were then asked to select the three best areas (i.e. that they considered their LA was delivering well) and the three worst areas (i.e. that required most improvement).

Figure 6 Gold standard exercise during focus groups



As shown below, priority areas were not so different from those highlighted by those LAs that had returned a completed self-assessment tool. For example, support with health and wellbeing, expressed mainly in terms of mental health, was identified by some groups as the area their LA was performing worst in.

Young people's gold standard priorities

During the care leaver focus groups we asked young people to pick their top three gold standard areas. This activity elicited much discussion and lively debate with different aspects being coveted by different young people.

One argument was that 'having an adequate income' was crucial.Without enough money then care leavers were unable to access things to help improve their wellbeing, to travel to their education, or to live in safe housing. Other young people identified both education and employment as the areas where their local authority was doing best due to the increased support given to get care leavers out of '*inactivity'*:'*They have been pushing it recently with the youth initiative workers helping young people getting back into education'*.

Across the young people's focus group discussions, the issue that rose to the top in four of the five LAs was '*ensuring care leavers voice was heard'* as young people explained:

> *'All the gold standards areas come into care leaver views being heard – if that wasn't top – then you can't know about the rest'*

Young people had differing views on what the worst areas of the gold standard were. One topic discussed was mental health support:

> '*It's not the fact that they* [LA 10] *are not doing it very well, there [sic] just not enough support and we're just not aware of how serious a problem depression is…they are just not investigating it, they don't know how bad we can feel...there needs to be more done, I don't just mean counselling, or mental illness, it might be your house or bills are getting on top of you and when you are in a hole it's more difficult to get yourself out of it…*'

As a solution to this, young people recommended that a specific member of staff who had training in mental health support and knowledge about care leavers was made available to care leavers , '*so that they didn't have to be passed from pillar to post…waiting for referrals'* Peer mentors were also suggested as a less formal way of talking through problems that other care leavers were likely to have experienced.

(Young people's focus groups in the case study areas)

2.6 Summary Points for chapter two

- The care leaver survey was an important starting point in embedding the NB approach and benchmarking the extent to which care leavers had a voice in their own communities and how well LAs were supporting them.
- Low response rates were reported in individual LAs. Despite this, surveys enabled the cumulative voice of almost 800 young people to be heard and reviewed.
- The main themes arising from the care leaver survey included the need to balance independence and freedom with gradual and effective preparation; the availability and accessibility of support; the degree to which young people felt prepared for living alone and the considerable sense of loneliness experienced by many young people.
- These messages echoed those from past research and add power to the urgent need for services to improve preparation and the extent to which young people are included and feel part of their communities.
- The self-assessment tool was completed by two-thirds (68%) of NB LAs at baseline and provided a useful snapshot of the extent to which they were providing a gold standard service to care leavers.
- The gold standard areas (identified by NB) and the component items within them (identified by the evaluation team) suggested that those areas of service that carried more statutory weight were likely to be in place.
- Areas and items that were most commonly identified as in need of attention and improvement largely related to providing effective, timely and appropriate preparation for independent living and addressing the mental health and wellbeing needs of care leavers. This resonates with the key messages arising from the young people who completed the NB care leavers' survey and thereby strengthens the evidence for further action to improve these issues.
- More work is required to test out the self-assessment tool, particularly with care leavers. A review exercise carried out with young people taking part in the focus groups indicated some consensus with the NB LAs as to the gold standard areas that required most improvement.

3. Chapter three. New Belongings in action

If they didn't care about what we think, this meeting wouldn't happen, we wouldn't be sitting here (YP focus group)

The principal aims of the evaluation were to describe the different components of the NB approach and understand the factors that helped embed it within LAs. This chapter looks at how the NB programme was being implemented and how it operated in practice across the 28 sites. It considers each of the core elements of the NB model to both describe how it was working and to draw out at any learning points from the LAs experiences that might help in sustaining and replicating the approach.

As outlined in Chapter one, NB was about '*systematically applying the elements and encouraging LAs to do all of the components'*. (Facilitator focus group member). Some of the core elements of the methodology were expected to be in place as part of the application process and whilst none of the 28 LAs had all components in place, NB facilitators reported that most had some pre-dating the start of the programme.

3.1 Undertake a care leaver survey

The NB programme provided a methodology (as discussed in Chapter two) for participating LAs to survey their care leavers. The intention was for the survey findings to be used to inform the development of each LA's work plan for the programme. In doing so, those areas prioritised as in need of action would reflect the views and needs of care leavers. How did this work in practice and could the means of canvassing young people for their views on service improvement be improved?

3.1.1 Did the survey work as planned?

'We used the care leaver survey as a benchmark and we plan to do it again in a year' (Manager LA 10).

Response rates

The response rates to the survey were low (between 4% and 27% of those contacted). As a result, the views of significant numbers of care leavers were not heard. The LAs were aware of this gap and recognised the need to address it in any future surveys or consultation exercises. Some suggested ways to improve the means by which the survey was distributed, acknowledging that simply sending it out in the post would be unlikely to elicit the highest number of returns (LAs 4 and 3). Ideas to improve engagement with the survey included: running informal discussions groups with opportunities for care leavers to come together over a pizza or refreshments (LA 4); asking Personal Advisers (PAs) to provide opportunities for young people to complete the survey in person during individual

meetings (LA 26); and adopting a peer research methodology by offering training to older care leavers as peer research interviewers to gather the views of other care leavers (LA 3). In a couple of LAs and clusters (e.g. LA 11) attempts had been made to make the questionnaire itself more appealing, less formal and user friendly. For example, some questionnaires included a photograph of the NB care leaver panellist, which was considered a '*useful way of personalising the approach*'.

There was recognition across LAs that care leavers can be an over canvassed group. Some reported that the NB survey had coincided with other survey requests and that this had contributed to low return rates (e.g. LA 26). To reduce the burden of receiving multiple invitations to answer questions some LAs had incorporated the NB survey into existing local surveys (e.g. LA 16). LAs that appeared to receive higher response rates had involved others to help with distribution, such as a care leaver apprentice (LA 25) or children right service colleagues (LA13). One LA had offered an incentive for all questionnaires returned, which they felt had boosted the number of respondents (LA10).

The questions

The style of questions were primarily open-ended meaning the responses from young people were not always detailed. For example, a number of questions often elicited one word answers that could mean different things for different young people e.g. 'freedom' or 'support'. To understand these themes, some LAs held follow up sessions with groups of young people to explore the issue in more detail. To avoid limited responses and misinterpretation future surveys might consider using a range of survey response techniques that include a mixture of tick boxes, likhart scales, images and open text questions. To ensure that the survey provides the LA with sufficient data on issues of local interest, they might like to use a co-production approach, working with a group of care leavers to identify some pertinent issues and to formulate the actual questions. The surveys might also provide LAs with useful means to evaluation their own service and areas or work and to track changes in opinion over time. For example, LA 26 inserted additional questions to the NB survey, on the quality of the young person's relationship with their PA and satisfaction with service support.

The data

Once the surveys were received some LAs said that they had struggled to process the large amount of data and would have valued more support in managing the analysis of information (e.g. LA 4). For example, typing up handwritten questionnaire responses had proved time consuming. The analysis tool provided by the evaluation team to assist with the task was used by a few LAs, though at least one LA reported that it had proved too complicated (e.g. LA 27). Efficiency in the future could be gained from using online questionnaire software. This removes the need for data inputting and can help with analysis (e.g. Survey monkey). As the care leaver survey findings are fundamental to the programme, serious consideration around building in more support and resources for LAs

that require it is likely to be welcomed. Where LAs reported fewer difficulties this was often attributed to having access to staff with the time and skills to co-ordinate both distribution and analysis.

Using findings

The findings from the surveys had been utilised in a number of ways, some more creative and wide reaching than others. For example, some findings and observations were captured in presentations used at corporate parenting meetings (e.g. LA 4) or using an infographic poster that was produced and displayed in services and young people's meeting spaces.

There was limited evidence of how the results of the surveys had been fed back to respondents. During our telephone interviewees with LA leads few mentioned how the young people who had taken the time to complete the surveys were informed about what happened to their views. This is an important step in the cycle of involving and working with young people and including them in the dissemination and feedback process should be overlooked.

Feedback from the LAs indicated that the results of the CL surveys were generally being used as intended and that their work plans were drawing on what young people had told them via the surveys (LA 4). Some commented that there were no particular surprises in what young people were saying (LA 4), although others felt that whilst they were aware of the general themes, the survey gave them additional detail on what young people said they needed from services (LA 15). In some cases, new themes and issues had emerged for LAs. For example, young people said they wanted to be more involved in their local communities. In one LA they said they were surprised (and pleased) that young people were more positive than they had expected about the relationships they had with staff and wanted to spend more time with them (LA 9).

Impact

LAs reported that it was valuable to hear directly from their young people, even when the messages were difficult to hear. One cited that their young people told them that they felt that they were being prepared for a life on benefits by the LA rather than the LA having high aspirations for them.For others, while the acute loneliness reported by young people was not a complete revelation, it was a stronger theme than they expected. One LA reflected that hearing these messages in young people's own words had conveyed a much more powerful sense of how they were feeling and experiencing leaving care.

> *'The survey didn't highlight anything that we weren't aware of. However, the extent of the isolation was on a larger scale than we had expected.* (Service manager, LA final review report)

A significant number said that the survey was something they planned to repeat (e.g. LAs 24, 8, 15, 9 and 23 though a minority already had well established and regular ways of gathering feedback from young people e.g. LA 16). Some said the impetus for undertaking the survey had given some momentum to plans to embed consultation with young people further in their work and that they had sought young people's views on other planned changes. (LA 8)

For many LAs the care leaver survey had been a bigger undertaking than they had expected, taking up significant resource and time (Facilitator focus group). As a result, there was some project slippage. For example, the work plans (that were informed by the survey) were delayed in many LAs. Despite this, it was regarded as an integral part of the NB model and one which required and deserved adequate time and resource. There were some areas for improvement particularly in how the survey was and can be conducted, extra support provided with analysis of the data and ensuring the findings of survey are well used and distributed back to those who took part. Despite these limitations on the whole participants found the process useful, had used it to inform their work and a number intended to repeat the process on an, at least, annual basis.

3.2 Review the role and experience of Personal Advisers

A second component of the NB programme was to understand the PA role and what, if any, improvements might be needed. Reflections gathered during the focus group with facilitators indicated a desire to see improvements in relation to the way PAs were able to support care leavers, including how PAs themselves were valued and supported:

> 'a *raised self-esteem and recognition within the authority, where people felt the support of leaders (permission) and increased capacity where Personal Adviser training and development was a priority'* (Facilitator focus group).

In order to try to achieve these, Phase 2 of the NB programme asked LAs to spend time examining the role of their PAs to explore the quality and level of support being offered to care leavers in their service. (See New Belongings Guide 2016).

Not all LAs were able to undertake this element of the NB programme. In information gathered during telephone interiviews with managers, one reported that this area of NB was not one they had particularly focused on because they felt confident in their service delivery model and PA support, based on positive feedback they received from their young people. A number of LAs felt that a particular focus was not needed as reviewing the PA role was part of the '*day job'* (LAs 25, 6 and 3). In other LAs this element of the programme had yet to be tackled or had only started towards the end of the programmed (LAs 11 and 14).

LAs reported a number of disparities between PAs and their social worker colleagues, for example in the number of 'cases' a PA was meant to hold as well as financial disparity in pay. A number of respondents alluded to the 'status' of the PAs role within their LA being

perceived as ‘unqualified’ and commented that colleagues in other teams sometimes misunderstood the complexity of the task and skills needed for the role (e.g.LA 9). It was clear that focusing on the capacity of PAs to build relationships and deliver the right support to care leavers was an important driver for some LAs and an area in which they could make changes.

During the programme timescale, a small number of LAs carried out work to address the amount of time PAs had to spend with young people by examining their PA job descriptions. This had resulted in changes in working arrangements leading to more capacity (smaller caseloads) and increased availability (LAs 22 and 15). Similarly, in one LA where the leaving care service was delivered by a third sector organisation, the contract arrangements had been revisited through the lens of ‘what do our young people want’ and as a result the contract had been revised (LA 25).

Practice example:
Changes to service delivery

We have developed an amended job description for Personal Advisors to ensure the voice of young people is driving services forward. They now have a rota system to allow young people to have contact for support from 9am-7:30pm. We have developed links with the youth service to enable our young people to be integrated into groups in the wider society.

Practice example:
Changes to service delivery

Feedback from young people regarding the generalised duty system in the Through team was that it was not working for Care Leavers and this led to an immediate review and change to the system, so that the Care Leavers now have their own duty system, manned by workers who have knowledge of the young people. Young people are much more satisfied and are not having to repeat their story to different workers who do not know their histories.

In other LAs smaller, but culturally significant, changes had taken place. For example in response to feedback from young people who said they don’t always know a lot about their workers, the LA (LA 11) had created profiles of staff with photos including practical information such as when and where they work as well as details on their personal interests and the reasons why they came into the profession.

'Young people are asked to share all the time and this is seen as sharing more about workers, it may lead to shared interests and could help at the start of a relationship when there is a change of worker' (LA 11 manager, telephone interview).

As part of the NB work there had been much activity concentrated on ensuring staff were confident about the particular entitlements care leavers have. From those we spoke with, a small number of LAs had taken up the offer of training provided by NB. This had involved NB panellists working alongside local young people to co-deliver sessions to workers about expectations of the PA role. These sessions were considered valuable as young people-led training represented a relatively innovative approach and there were hopes that it could be further rolled to more staff (e.g. LA 4). Examples in other LAs involved NB colleagues and young people working together to share ideas on issues and developing training to run a care leaver forum (LAs 9, 12 and 6). Another authority had worked alongside their care leaver panellist and local young people on the redevelopment of their pathway plan (LA 11).

Practice example:
Young people co-delivering training to Personal Advisers

In one site a small number of young people had been involved in working with New Belongings panellists on developing training for Personal Advisers. They felt that the experience had overall been positive but that there could be improvements to the way things were set up. For example, the preparation session could have been longer as it had felt rushed at times, and they wanted more time to think about their opinions. The expectations on the young people from the authority were high as the young people spoke in front of staff; something which they described as daunting but ultimately led to a sense of achievement and the feeling that it had been a good opportunity to get their view point across to staff.

'What I noticed was that everyone had different perspectives on the care system – even though we are in the same country, all local authorities completely different. So someone from [one area] *may not be able to understand what like in* [different area] *– it was a good thing to speak to them but they had a totally different perspective so I think it would have been much better if* [they had] *been from round our area who can understand our authority.'*
(YP focus group)

Other LAs had explored the training that was needed and conducted sessions to upskill and support their PAs. This included a coaching and mentoring programme; sessions on pathway planning and entitlements; and investing in mental wellbeing training for all

those working with care leavers (LA 13). Further examples included exploring options for academic courses for PAs (LA 9) and providing a training programme for PAs based on the principles of restorative practice. Some LAs noted that the majority of these training and skills opportunities were delivered without the input of NB (e.g. LA 23, 24, 13 and 27).

Practice example:
Changes to service delivery

We have also seen team members utilise knowledge and interest as a result of New Belongings, one team member taking a lead in benefit liaison and in establishing better working protocol whilst another will be facilitating a support group for our care leavers who are parents as a result of the NB dissemination event. (LA final review report)

During the NB programme, it was apparent that in a small number of LAs significant changes to the structure and delivery models of services had occurred or were planned for the near future (e.g. LA 26). Data gathered during telephone interviews with managers and lead staff in the LAs highlighted a number of examples. In one, plans were underway to create new bespoke teams of PAs, representing a move away from care leaver support being delivered by workers with mixed 'caseloads' (e.g. having responsibility for other groups of young people and children such as children in need). In another LA, changes to the service delivery model had received positive early feedback from young people and that there had been a reduction in the number of complaints received. Furthermore, care leavers were reporting that they were spending more time with their worker. The LA reported that relationships between staff and young people had been strengthened (LA 8).

Such structural changes were often attributed to other external improvement drivers such as the result of Ofsted inspections and subsequent recommendations, adopting and embedding changes were said to take considerable time and resource. Whilst such transition was taking place, LAs described that it was helpful to have the NB programme and team to help maintain a focus on the centrality of young people's voice.

Practice example:
Changes to service delivery

Over the last year we have reorganised the way in which we deliver services to our care leavers, a primary driver for this was the feedback we had received from young people about a change of social worker at 16 which they were unhappy with. The second phase of this re-organisation was to relocate the drop in service for young people. The care leavers' forum has been consulted about the changes and together with the CICC (Children in care council) have been involved in purchasing items for the building. (LA final review report)

3.3 Care leaver forum

Capturing the voice and views of care leavers was central to the NB model and a requirement of taking part in the programme. LAs had been asked to create a dedicated group or forum for care leavers or to strengthen any existing forums or groups that were already in place (as was the case for some LAs).

> *'The method and model of participation we have has been promoted by New Belongings, not as a result of New Belongings supporting us to develop participatory mechanisms'* (LA 18).

Evidence from the telephone interviews, focus groups and final progress reports showed that some LAs that did not have a functioning forum prior to NB had developed one during the programme year (e.g. LA 3). More common was that LAs cited they already had care leaver representation via their Children in Care Council (CiCC). The NB team, however, were clear that LAs should ensure there was a bespoke forum for care leavers to facilitate their particular views, experiences and voice. Part of the reason that the NB team remained resolute that a separate forum was needed was based on their experiences in Phase 1. Fundamentally they felt that the views of younger children in care and older young people often differed, especially in relation to accommodation, welfare benefits and income as well as employment (facilitator focus group).

Establishing a forum

In the majority of cases LAs either had or were working towards setting up, a separate care leaver forum. In LA 8, where the views of young people had been canvassed, it was decided not to set up a separate groups as their young people preferred to remain as part of a wider group with children in care as they '*were keen to influence things whilst young people were still in care rather than solely issues connected to leaving care'*. As a result, the authority had split their CICC by age to a younger and older one. This was said to be working well as it contained elements of informal mentoring between the

different age groups. In this case the LA felt there was a need for less rigidity in the NB model. (LA 8)

Practice example
Establishing a forum for care leavers

While we had a strong CiCC, we did not have representation from the care leaver population in their own right. There has been real value in developing the Care Leaver Forum and this has been important in progressing some of the identified work.

Establishing the forum has not been without its challenges and the New Belongings panellists were really supportive in helping us think about our approach and how we demonstrate the value we place on our young people.
(LA final review report)

Engaging young people

A common issue raised across the LAs was concern at the low numbers attending their care leaver groups and the lack of representation from new attendees (LAs reported that numbers ranged from five to 12 core young people). In the main, LAs were keen to increase the reach of the group to include more care leavers to both strengthen and diversify the voices they heard.

Respondents to our telephone interviews cited a number of approaches they had utilised or planned to utilise, to help promote the forums to young people who were not yet engaged. Ideas included**:**

- Ensuring PAs talked to young people about the opportunity
- Exploring if current members of the forum could help garner interest by talking to young people who might be interested in taking part
- Establishing opportunities for drop-in sessions for young people who might be interested to find out more about the forums and to facilitate opportunities for young people to meet (LA 9)
- Understanding that it takes time to develop group relationships and build membership (LA 16)

The NB facilitators reflected that, in their experiences, the way in which a forum was described or promoted to potential care leaver members was important. NB team experience indicated that forums which worked best had certain traits: they were open, often run at arm's length from the LA (e.g. by Children right service) to represent a degree of independence, and were partly social and partly work driven. Ultimately, the critical factor was that they were somewhere that young people wanted to go to (facilitator focus group).

Practice example:
Reaching more young people

Young people in the focus groups expressed some frustrations about the current configuration of their forum groups, emphasising that it is often the same young people who come along and feeling that *no one knows about us* despite attempts by participation workers and themselves to increase recruitment through visiting children homes, contacting foster carers and speaking to social worker teams as well as other young people they knew. Despite the lack of take-up from their efforts, the young people involved said they were determined to 's*hout about it* ' [the forum work] and continue to work on increasing the numbers of young people who attended and took an active part in the group.

(YP focus group)

Practice example:
Using social media to reach more young people

Focus groups with young people in our case study sites revealed a mixed picture in terms of the degree of engagement between care leavers and the service. Young people emphasised strongly that many of their peers didn't get to hear about things happening in the service nor necessarily get involved in consultation events or forums. They felt that LAs needed to investigate using social media as a way to communicate with young people. Young people did acknowledge that there may be hesitation or fear on the part of the authority and that a degree of caution was needed in terms of usage (such as not having personal Facebook details of staff and young people being assured it was a closed group so not everyone could see they were part of something associated with being in care) but despite this they urged services to work through such issues as using social media would be useful.

> *Social media is the only way, posters don't really look at, but you are always on your phone.*

(YP focus group)

One authority raised the important issue of how difficult it can be to include the views from care leavers who live out of area (Area 6). Also raised was the issue of succession planning to make sure LAs had a range of young people taking part and were able to sustain the forum if and when other young people chose to move on from the group (LA 3).

Views gathered during telephone interviews and focus groups showed that LAs had experienced a range of barriers to effectively facilitating care leaver forums. These included:

- Young people's availability (college, work and parenting responsibilities) (LA 24)
- Availability of a budget from the LA for young people to take part in social activities (LA 24). This LA was considering a way of overcoming this issue by linking the group to existing council initiatives or supporting young people to fundraise
- Geography of the authority was a challenge in large areas where forums tended to run in a central town but were not always accessible for care leavers living elsewhere in the area (e.g. LA 26). As a result one LA recognised there was a need to run several different groups but this hadn't always happened (LA 27)
- One LA respondent cited the differing personalities in the group as being potentially prohibitive to others' joining, as group dynamics could be dominated by one or two individuals. Work was said to be ongoing to address this (LA 15)

It was evident from the telephone interviews with LA staff that the forums were at different stages of development. The organisation of the forums differed in how they were serviced and facilitated. For example, whether they held regular meetings (frequency seemed to vary from weekly to around bi-monthly), whether young people had dedicated space available to meet, if a terms of reference had been developed (these seemed rare), and whether a forum work plan had been developed.

There seemed to be a range of staff involved in the support and facilitation of the forums. In some it was led by a participation worker and in others by a PA (in some cases in addition to managing their own caseloads) (LA 11). There were also some examples of care leaver apprentices taking on responsibility for the forum. Examples also included outsourcing the facilitation of the forum to third sector organisations.In one case this was said to have been prompted by a request from young people themselves who wished to be supported by an organisation '*separate from the council'* (LAs 15, 4, 26 and 23).

Whist all LAs appeared to have or to be working towards a forum, there was a concern that this method was not seen as a panacea for gathering the views of care leaver's because some care leavers would be unable or unwilling to join a forum. LAs were keen to emphasise that they wanted to offer a range of ways to hear young people's voices not just through a forum. One had developed a range of 'have your say' opportunities including holding a social meal (which enabled care leavers to cook together); one-to-one discussions; topic focused working groups; regular social activities or drop-ins; and, in some cases, residential activities so that young people could engage how, and when, they wanted rather than committing to a regular forum (e.g. LAs 6 and 15).

Care leaver forums – having an impact

Over the NB year an impressive array of activities and work was undertaken by forum groups. The breadth and detail of the activities are described in detail in NB dissemination event reports and the New Belongings Guide (2016). A selection of the examples demonstrating the types of activity and impact included: social action activities such as cake-making fundraising (which had raised money for others and helped with young people's cooking skills) (LA 24); work to influence the content of the teenage pregnancy strategy workshop and ensuring young people's voices were included via video (LA 25); 'learning circles' with staff and young people to co-produce ideas (LA 15); influencing and shaping the content of a preparation for independence booklet (LA 3); and developing a more 'young person' friendly pathway plan (LA 23). There were some examples of staff and young people working together, however, one respondent lamented that the young people's group work plan was not yet aligned to the management improvement work stream and as a result they felt young people were not always at the centre of what was taking place (LA 26).

Whilst forums were a place to work on issues that care leavers wished to improve, they were also about ensuring care leavers had increased social opportunities, building relationships and networks and in many ways a chance to develop skills through taking part in specific activities (for example, cooking; project planning; and residential stays).

The feedback loop

The interviews and focus groups revealed that the LAs were at different stages in terms of the effectiveness of the 'feedback loop,' whereby the views expressed by care leavers at the forum were channelled through the LA and ultimatelyfed back to those who had originally taken part.

For some there was occasional senior management presence at meetings, which facilitated feedback, but this seemed to be occasional rather than regular attendance. One group had received written feedback that provided a response to their ideas (LA 4) and some care leaver groups attended and took part in strategic meetings such as corporate parenting panels. A couple of LAs explicitly said they were concerned about the quality of the feedback loop in their service (e.g. LA 26). In contrast, others felt confident in their processes, stating they had an established cycle of using the evidence from care leavers' views in shaping their action plans, though with the caveat that they knew they were not yet near an equal relationship between young people and decision makers (LA 15).

> *'Our Care Leavers Panel has a strong core group of care leavers who are helping to drive change forward. This group is very well led. It is welcoming, accessible, well planned and supported. There is full debrief to senior leaders following the meetings and Care leavers can see that their views are listened to and acted upon.* (LA final review report.)

There was a sense that the care leaver groups that were operating during the NB year were starting to feel different to what had been in place before and that young people were beginning to feel more '*empowered*' to express their voices.

Being part of the care leaver forum

The identity of the care leaver groups varied, either specifically associating as a 'New Belongings' group or as a LA group (LA 25). In the case of the former there was some uncertainty over the future of the NB brand and whether LAs would continue to use this name. In some instances, ensuring the care leaver group was known as a local group was seen as important in trying to get their voice heard at senior level (LA 25).

Practice example:
Ownership of the forum

The group have developed their confidence to participate and can see the possibilities for the future. However, it is their confidence about owning their projects, and taking the lead that while we know they are able to do this, they are reluctant to own and take control.
(LA final review report)

Evidence from telephone interviews and care leaver focus groups across the LAs showed the potential positive impact that taking part in a forum could have on some young people. Participation had led to increased confidence, a sense of ownership and inclusion and the development of social, practical and work related skills as well as opportunities to make links with the wider community.

> *'I think knowing the group from when first started to where we are now – they can voice opinions more, express selves more* [they] *should be proud of selves and ideas come out with and how passionate* [they] *are about things getting done*' (Participation worker, focus group).

> *'Been good to see everyone grow as a group. For everyone to have their voice, have their say, brought closer together, some of us don't get along but when we have problems we leave that outside …respect each other* (Young person, focus group).

Practice example:
Being part of a forum

Care leavers on the forums have reported that they feel more confident in vocalising the issues that affect them, for example housing, finance and isolation. Being part of a forum dedicated to care leavers has enabled them to voice their concerns and they now feel that their concerns are being taken into account. One has recently used skills she has learnt working on the forum to support a successful job application.
(LA final review report)

Practice example:
Being part of a forum

For those who have been involved in the forum we have seen a significant improvement in their confidence to articulate themselves and to think about the wider issues and perspectives. For this group there is likely to be a direct benefit due to improved presentation skills and improved skills in represent their peers and sharing information. For the wider peer group, we believe that the work we have done with the forum has improved the connection between services and young people, as young people are themselves supporting the communication.
(LA final review report)

3.4 Develop multi-agency work plans

Building on the survey, forum and review of the PA role, NB LAs were asked to develop a plan which set out the issues on which the authority aimed to make progress. The NB team requested regular updates on the progress of the plan (captured via an internal monitoring dashboard that was usually prepared by a care leaver panel member). Facilitators were clear that LAs did not want to be told what to do as they should know their local population and, therefore, within the NB programme the onus was on LAs to develop their own bespoke solutions with critique and challenge on the content from the facilitators and panellists (facilitator focus group).

Establishing NB plans took longer than expected. This was in part due to the extra time the survey took and also the fact that LAs ideally wanted their plans signed off by their chief executive officer (CEO) or Director of Children's Services. By January 2016, two-thirds of the way through the programme, most of the 28 LAs had their plans in place. Two had not yet agreed plans and four LAs had draft plans that had not been finalised.

Some LAs explicitly linked their NB plan with existing plans in order to streamline and embed the work (LA 26). A reminder that the NB programme did not exist in isolation to other improvement work or indeed wider policies and impetus. One LA echoed the experience of others when it reflected that their NB action plan influenced the bigger LA improvement plan already in operation. LAs did not necessarily want a set of disparate plans but a co-ordinated approach and for some LAs the NB work brought a particular focus on care leavers and led to aspects of the wider authority plan being amended in light of what young people had said (LA 3). In such circumstances NB offered an opportunity to tie different parts of existing plans together to form some cohesion and focus on care leavers, to help bring structure and move things on (LA 13). Many of the actions and outcomes in the plans were not fully completed and lasted beyond the end of the project date (March 2016) due to the length of time it can take to set up, pilot, refine and embed changes.

Practice example:
New Belongings planning

We asked ourselves what we could do that addresses the issues young people have raised and that will make the most difference to their day-to-day lives. We then made sure that the New Belongings Plan complimented our existing improvement activity and became part of our improvement plan. New Belongings ensured that our improvement work reflected the needs and wishes of care leavers and also galvanised our corporate response and shared accountability to improve outcomes.

We used existing governance structures, including Children's Services Improvement Board, Corporate Parenting Panel and Assistant Mayoral briefings, to support and challenge improvement work.
(LA final review report)

Practice example:
New Belongings planning

New Belongings enabled us to develop the existing framework of support into a format that brought together all the elements of the service into one document. This document became a platform for us to seek agreement from Senior Management to move forward on some of the key indicators such as apprenticeships. This has embedded New Belongings into the existing service development plan, ensuring its continuation post New Belongings.
(LA final review report)

Some concern was raised about the extent to which LA plans were modified or developed based on what young people had said and how far they had taken account of their views. A key part of the panellist and facilitator role was to critique the content of the plans and ensure the actions linked back to the findings in the survey and related to what young people were saying:

> *There is tokenism, even if did change direction a bit but if put apprenticeship [in work plan] is this because it government target and opportunity for care leaver rather than what young people actually need. Is some change; don't know how much is meaningful change. Hard to decipher between the two.* (Panellist focus group)

A small number of LAs reflected that much of what they had outlined in their plan and had subsequently achieved over the year was likely to have happened anyway regardless of whether they were part of NB of not, and whilst things may have been 'badged' under NB, they felt their work could not be wholly attributed to the programme (LA 3 and LA 14).

Telephone interviews with LA staff involved with NB explored some of the highlights from their work plan. In addition to the tangible examples of *what* LAs did (examples have been provided throughout this report) some respondents were also able to reflect on the changes to the *way*s in which they had done things. LAs talked about raising aspirations across their services for care leavers (LA 15); ensuring care leavers were included in work to develop services (LA 25, LA 6); making better connections with strategic colleagues and wider partners 'putting care leavers on the map' (LA 9 and LA 10) and stretching what they offer beyond statutory expectations and trying out new ideas.

Some LAs' appraisal of what they had achieved over the year highlighted the barriers they had encountered and frustrations at not being able to progress some aspects of their plans. Sometimes the reason for this related to fact that the immediate service (care leaver service) had less ability to influence progress when working with colleagues from other services (LA 25).

From an examination of the work plans, telephone interviews, NB project documentation, and self-assessment findings, it was apparent that some of the top issues identified by care leavers in the survey (see Chapter two) were starting to be tackled via the action plans. Namely, addressing isolation; understanding entitlements; money management; and preparation for independent. But such topics were not universal across LAs.

Below we give some illustrative examples relating to the main issues identified in the care leaver survey to show where progress was being made. We have not aimed to capture all work in these areas, for more examples please see The New Belongings Guide 2016.

Practice example:
Supporting and extending young people's networks to combat isolation

We identified a suitable unused space in our [council building], and engaged the Care Leavers Forum to agree, design and re-furbish the area based on an assessment of its own needs and wishes. We allocated a budget of £2000 to the Forum for this purpose. A separate side entrance was created for the sole use of those accessing the facility in order to give it a truly self-contained character, and to avoid the hassle of entering via the main entrance and having to obtain passes from reception.

In providing a self-contained space of this nature, and delegating responsibility for design and refurbishment to the Care Leavers Forum, we have ensured that those using the facility felt a strong sense of ownership and pride.

The facility is bright, airy and welcoming and has modern, fully equipped lounge, kitchen and dining areas with facilities for child care. It also has dedicated internet/Wi-Fi facilities and convenient access to both on-site and visiting service support staff (covering education, health, housing etc.). The space has enabled a programme of support to be developed with partners to help prepare young people for leaving care.
(LA final review report)

Practice example:
Supporting and extending young people's networks to combat isolation

We have invested in training for two care leavers to become mentors for others. It is hoped this will be extended and foster carers will be supported to train as mentors for our young people leaving care. (LA final review report)

Practice example :
Understanding entitlements

Development of a local offer for care leavers: this will be going live in the final quarter of the project and will allow children and young people in care and leaving care staff a detailed explanation of what entitlements they are eligible for and what services are available in the area. (LA final review report)

Practice example :
Budgeting and money management

The priorities emerging from our survey included the difficulties young people have with budgeting and managing on a very limited income. We have as a result of our survey strengthened our relationship with a voluntary organisation which runs bespoke services for young people with their financial management.

An unexpected outcome of this work was the friendships the young people who attended formed. At the end of the course they were able to exchange contact details and made a commitment to remain in contact. Increasing friendships and social networks will assist in addressing the loneliness young people spoke of in the survey.
(LA final review report)

Practice example :
Easing financial pressures

Care leavers have consistently said to us that it is extremely difficult for them to transition from being in education or on benefits into living independently on their first, often very low wage. Council tax was identified, through care leaver surveys and other feedback, as a particularly challenging bill for them to pay at this critical stage of their lives.

Through discussions within the Care Leavers Forum, and the authority more generally, we developed a draft policy which would have the effect of providing financial support to care leavers in terms of meeting their council tax commitments, in a manner which was manifestly fair and proportionate.

In this regard, it was recognised as important not to exempt care leavers from council tax, given the difficult precedent this would be likely to set (i.e. other vulnerable and equally deserving groups would undoubtedly lobby for similar treatment on a justifiable basis).

The challenge was therefore to formulate a transparent policy which did no more than provide a level of financial support to care leavers, in the Council's role as corporate parent, which was little different from the support that parents or guardians might provide to their own children in similar circumstances.

Against this background, a policy was devised which involved the authority meeting the costs of council tax liabilities for those care leavers aged between 18 and 21, living independently and either unemployed or in apprenticeships or entry level jobs, in order to help manage their transition from education through to becoming financially independent.
(LA final review report)

Practice example:
Improving accommodation and combatting loneliness

We worked directly with our vulnerable housing team to increase the stock of training flats for young people to enable them to move in to a small independent flat supported by ourselves and housing with the intention of taking the flat on as their own tenancy. Through the training flat programme, we also introduced a buddying system amongst the young people. New young people have been paired up with others within their area and also with interests to allow them to discuss and work through some of the issues.
(LA final review report)

3.5 Ensure strategic commitment and corporate parenting

The LAs were all at different starting points in terms of how much strategic leverage and commitment was evident from the CEO, corporate parenting partners and leader of the council.

During the NB programme it was clear that many LAs had strengthened their local corporate parenting approach. For a small number of LAs this had meant young people having the opportunity to engage with senior leaders for the first time via attendance at corporate parenting boards or by senior decision makers attending care leaver forums (LA 24, LA 3). In these LAs, this development was universally welcomed (LA 24). One authority reported that the inclusion of young people on their strategic groups was still in the planning stage and not yet realised (LA 4).

Many LAs, however, said that young people already had opportunities to meet with senior personnel pre-dating NB (e.g. LA 11). Nevertheless, a number of LAs had increased the volume of interaction between young people and senior leaders during NB and made improvements to how things were run. For example, one authority reported that they had formalised the feedback between their care leaver group and the board and improved the terms of references and lines of accountability (LA 8).

Increasing the number of opportunities for young people to meet with senior colleagues brought many benefits, not least increased confidence in young people of their ability to challenge colleagues, develop working relationships and to move issues forward. (LA 9). With time and experience, one LA indicated that they had progressed work on ensuring that views shared at panel were not just the personal individual views of the young people attending but were based on representing the views of a wider group of young people (LA 8).

Facilitators from NB reflected that '*the personal influence of the care leavers they [senior leaders] meet can make decision-makers realise they can do more than what they had assumed they could do, providing an opportunity to fill in a silhouette and challenge misperceptions'* (facilitator focus group). Anecdotal evidence from the NB team reported

that senior councillors who had attended NB launches in LAs and had heard young people speaking passionately about their journey and what support was needed were, on occasion, left feeling humbled. As a result they had reappraised their views of care leavers, which had often been built on negative stereotypes. As one facilitator reflected, giving space for young people and senior leaders to come together had allowed the stereotypes to be challenged, they noted the words of one committee member '*I only hear about the problems…didn't realise the majority were educated and articulate*'.

Practice example:
Strategic engagement

Some young people who were part of the focus groups were involved in their authority's corporate parent board and attended at set intervals (every 3 months), in addition senior managers attended their forum at times. Generally, they felt that some of those they met '*were listening and nodding'* but that there was still a long way to go in terms of translating discussion into action.

At times young people said they felt that care leavers were low on the priority list for senior staff; '*always something that seem more important than care leavers, so why should we care about this forum*, *think that once you got a job, flat or one of these things they think you are fine'.*

The group reflected that whilst their views were being heard, it was not as much they wanted it to. There was an appetite for more feedback. Sometimes they did get told what had happened to their views, which might take a while, but they wanted to know the outcome from their meetings even when this meant being told why things were not happening and had not changed. A year after New Belongings it appeared there was still work to be done to help young people's voice be actively listened to and acted upon.
(LA focus group)

Overall, ensuring senior colleagues were 'on board' and aware of the issues facing care leavers was seen as vital to raising and maintaining the profile of care leavers. At times this could have a 'dominoes' effect of opening up relationships with other departments and colleagues bringing partners and providers together (LA 23).

> *'We have full Senior Leadership support for New Belongings. There is a firm commitment and drive to improve our corporate parenting responsibilities, our service delivery and our outcomes for Care leavers. Time has been allocated by our Chief Executive Officer to brief all senior Leaders across the council about the importance of our Corporate Parenting responsibilities and how improving outcomes for our Care leavers is an important priority for us'.* (Local authority respondent, LA final review report)

Practice example:
Strategic engagement

The Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) structure, terms of Reference and working practice was reviewed. Care Leavers were part of that review and significantly influenced expectations and the new working practice going forward. The links between Children in care council (CiCC) and other working groups of the CPB were strengthened and reporting lines were clarified. It served to 'reinforce and clarify' the significance of the Corporate Parenting role and responsibility and embed commitment from strategic and Political leaders. Young people co-deliver briefing sessions to Elected Members to help them understand their Corporate Parenting role. It led to unexpected work opportunities being offered to two of our Care Leavers, changes to our Local Authority contracting (still in progress) and development of a dedicated EET worker for Care Leavers. (LA final review report)

3.6 Delivering the New Belongings programme

An impressive aspect of the NB programme was the continued level of engagement across the 28 LAs, with seemingly low attrition rates only one authority did not engage at all (see Chapter four for more information on authority progress and engagement). It was a credit to the team of facilitators and panellists that they had sustained effective working relationships with the vast majority of the 28 LAs, particularly through many changes of LA staff.

The facilitator role

The extent to which LAs made particular use of the NB facilitators varied, with some drawing heavily on their support and others having limited contact. Facilitators were mostly considered friendly, helpful and approachable with some LAs reflecting that they felt '*very well supported by the New Belongings facilitator and panellist'* (e.g. LA 4 and LA 7).

> *'I think [facilitator] has been incredibly focused, I thinks she's held me to account, when you think it's NB [phone call] today and you think you'd better go through the action plan, and she'll say you haven't sent me the work plan, get it updated' (LA 10 LA manager interview).*

Facilitators were said to keep in touch mainly via email. They were praised for their persistence and patience during times of change within LAs (LA 8), which could mean that requests for information were not always acknowledged or actioned. Although facilitators did not always meet with LAs in person, most LAs nevertheless reflected that facilitators were generally available for support as and when needed (LA 8, LA 26). In a

number of LAs, facilitators had held a one-off meeting with senior personnel in the LAs to update on NB and further keep the focus on care leavers (e.g. LA 26 and LA 10).

Experiences were, however, mixed and some LAs reported less positively. In a minority of cases the LAs noted that their facilitator was not always present at cluster meetings or sufficiently available to contact. For example, when a new staff member joined one LA to lead on NB they were not given support to '*walk through'* the methodology. The LA acknowledged there may have been miscommunication and the facilitator may not have necessarily been aware of changes that had taken place (LA 3). Whilst this demonstrates that it was not always possible for the facilitators to keep up to date with their LAs, the reasons for this are many and included the particular approach of the facilitator and also the resources and limited time availablefor them to carry out their role. Also, the NB ethos emphasised that the main driver for embedding work plans was through LAs listening to care leavers and therefore, the role of facilitator was deliberately '*light touch'*.

Further observations were made about the level of in-depth knowledge of the facilitators on the specialist area of care leavers. For example, some LAs noted that the facilitators were not always being up to date and '*clear on all nuances'* in relation to care leaver issues and legislation (LA 16). That said, other LAs were keen to voice their appreciation of the different skills facilitators brought. One reported that they had valued their facilitators' expertise in the civil service landscape, which had proved useful for navigating local systems (LA 23).

An issue to arise during interviews was what '*added value'* LAs had received from the NB team. Although many had valued the additional support and focus it had brought to their local work, others felt less strongly, one LA at least commented that the progress they had made was solely attributable to internal work and not *the 'New Belongings national team who they had not used'.* This authority also noted they had not utilised their care leaver panellists (LA 25).

Care leaver panellists role

> *'I've got nothing but praise, I think the panellists were brilliant, vibrant – the day they all came here, one did some work with our PAs, one did some work with our care leaver apprentice on how she could deliver training to the others, and then they met our Chief Executive and then ran a consultation group for teenage mums'.* (Manager interview)

Experiences of working with the panellists were equally varied. Again, not all LAs drew upon the care leaver panellists to the same extent. Where it had occurred, LAs generally spoke very highly of the support that they had brought and the positive involvement that had taken place across different aspects of the work locally, with both young people and managers. One LA described the collaboration between themselves and NB team as '*inspiring*' (LA 4), whilst another LA assigned a large part of the NB input directly to the panellist, who was described as completely engaged and having made a massive difference (LA 27). One authority that had made particular use of the care leaver

panellists' time and skills described their input as important for ensuring an *'unfailing emphasis on the importance of care leavers being involved in decision making'* (LA 4).

In addition, the panellists were well regarded by the facilitators for the knowledge they brought to the programme on issues such as communication and social media, which they reported had made a big difference to the programme reaching people (Facilitator focus group).

Getting the balance of input correct was important to both the LAs ownership of the work and also the demands on panellists, who worked part- time. In a small number of areas support from care leaver panellist(s) had not always been readily available and panellist(s) had not always been able to attend as much of the activity as the LA had envisaged (LA 15). Similarly, others felt that whilst this was a valuable aspect of the project it was one that had not been fully realised and the panellists had not been as involved as they would have wanted (e.g. LA 16, LA 3). One LA felt strongly that the support received had been disappointing (LA 25) they had not used the panellists and the facilitator had not been particularly engaged. In addition, they expressed concern that there was insufficient flexibility in the model for LAs that wished to take up support in different ways.

Reasons for limited involvement with panellists included the geographic spread of the programme, where even clusters could cover a large area and the panellists lived at distance from their linked LAs. Where some panellists had been unavailable, this led to inconsistencies in representation and how things were approached (LA 15). There was some comment that the full availability of panellists and the wide range of work they could engage in had not been communicated well enough and that some LAs did not take up the full range of potential support simply because they did not know about it.

In some cases, the LAs had not felt a need to engage the help of panellists as they were confident that their local care leaver experts were preforming the role well (e.g. LA 8). One LA reflected that young people in their area were less likely to engage with young people from other areas who might be less familiar with the local issues or with the local care leaver population. As noted above, this was especially so where they had older care leavers already available and working with their younger peers in and leaving care.

Where panellists had been able to engage well with LAs there was evidence of impact. Such LAs reported that the attendance by panellists at LA meetings (including meeting with strategic leads) could be particularly influential and their views and advice were perceived to have been listened to. However, on occasion there was a balance to be struck where a panellist may be advocating for something that was particularly personal to them and reflected more about their opinion and journey than a broader experience. This is not uncommon in any arena in which advocates draw upon their lived experience. There could, therefore, be a fine line between expressing passion for certain issues and objectively representing evidence or views from the local context. This was an issue recognised by the panellists themselves.

'It would have been good to know more about the boundaries, for what I can say with professionals in the local authority – as a young person I can be brutally honest. As a young person I like to have freeness of how it is, how other young people think it is and not pretty it up. Young people don't always talk in a correct manner, they say this is how it i , if I know more of what I could have said I would have been clearer in the role. Would have been good to have had this conversation.' (Care leaver panellist focus group).

It was, at times, a challenge to keep in mind; *'they are the experts in their own experience not in everyone's experience'* (facilitator focus group). Where appropriate facilitators sought to work with panellists on this through informal mentoring and reflection post meetings.

Panellists had differing views on the amount '*training*' and opportunities for shared learning they had received, needed or wanted as part of NB programme. Some panellists felt that they 'don't *require training – I would have felt insulted if I'm told this is how you talk to managers'* (Panellist focus group). Whilst in contrast, others reflected: *' I feel like I'm quite young and I could have done with some training – if had, I could have got more from it'* (Panellist focus group).

Like any group, the panellists brought different skills and experiences to the role. Some were more confident in their role than others. A couple of ideas of how to improve things were made such as more established panellists mentoring or buddying with those who were newer; some attempt had been made to do this as the clusters were made up, where possible, of mix a panellist from Phases 1 and 2.

'This was my first year and I did feel a bit challenged – I was pleased to be working with a care leaver panellist with more experience and she took a lead – if I was struggling. I did things I never done before; I did a training day which was terrifying and it is something I can take with me to other roles – some of the summary and write up work [was] *useful for me. Yes, I've challenged myself. I helped improve outcomes for people's lives, improved my skills and I got paid for it as well; so a win-win situation.* (Panellist focus group)

With regard to their work in the LAs panellists reflected that the work had been an opportunity to learn about how things work in different areas and gain experience for their careers. They reflected that their contribution and role had generally been *'taken seriously and they had been treated as professionals'.* (Care leaver panellist focus group)

*'[a] chance to make a difference; chance to skill self-up; go to different [authorities]…. put the young people at front of delivery and the opportunity to be paid decent amount daily fee; puts value on what you have to bring. Gain practical work experience rather than voluntary. As you get older and not in a position to do voluntary or work for free'. (*Care leaver panellist focus group)

Panellists commented that they would have liked broader opportunities to get to know the authorities they were working with, such as a chance to shadow workers and spend time in team meetings, getting to know Personal Advisers and getting to know the 'real' picture. In some instances, the reason why this had not happened had been attributed to some LA's not being as receptive as others or actively limiting access and 'gate keeping'.

> *'I wanted to get a better idea of what the service is like and how it operates – how Personal Advisers run, go to office and get a feel of it , I see senior managers painting this picture but I didn't believe it – they are not realistic. What care leavers think and what staff think is different. We need to be more in the mix'. (Panellist focus group)*

In reflecting on their roles and on the NB programme, discussion during the care leaver panellist focus group led to ideas of inverting the whole NB methodology and starting with young people rather than CEO sign up, as some of the panellists explained:

> *'Model says get leader signed up, get CEO signed up but what we saying is get the young people signed up first. Build care leaver profile and help their skills'.* (Care leaver panellist focus group)

> *'Would do it other way round, start with young person, its tokenistic the survey – if we only met three care leaver from each authority – be good to see bigger cohort – also it's boring for care leavers to go through a plan and don't know relevancy. [Start with young people] being in their social setting and see how things work for them, have more interaction, work with young people for six months, seeing issues'*. (Care leaver panellist focus group)

NB programme management

Throughout the NB programme there were some project management issues. Some LAs felt that the reporting requirements were, at times, onerous. Other criticisms related to delays in setting up meetings, sharing and coordinating information (LA 16), and receiving information about events in timely way. (LA 26). For example, there was some discontent from participants at the apparent delays in writing up and circulating the learning from the two national dissemination events, particularly to those LAs that could not attend (LA 25).

Such issues might be a reflection of the stretched resources within the programme, particularly during the scale up from nine LAs in Phase 1 to 28 in Phase 2. Furthermore, NB model was intended (and ultimately resourced) as 'light touch.' However, in reality many hours of pro-bona time were reported to have been given by the NB facilitators and the wider NB team.

In response to the support from the NB team, one LA observed '*you get what you put in*, and they felt that they had committed fully to the model and the regular scrutiny from the NB team and as a result commented that they had got more out of the experience than some of the other LAs they observed (LA 15).

A small number of panellists raised the idea of an alternative NB model which started with young people's commitment and initially concentrated on working at this level to develop views, experiences and ideas as a precursor to the NB model which starts with senior leadership sign-up.

3.7 Summary points for chapter three

Care leaver forum

- For many LAs the care leaver survey had been a bigger undertaking than they had expected and took significant resource and time.
- As a result, there was some project plan slippage and work plans were ready later than the original time schedules. However, despite this the survey was regarded as an integral and useful part of the NB model.
- Ideas on how to improve the way the survey is conducted included offering a variety of ways to complete the questionnaire (postal, online, with worker, in groups, via peer researchers).
- Many LAs would appreciate extra support with analysis of the data.
- LAs needed to ensure the findings of the survey were well used and distributed back to those who took part.
- On the whole participants found the care leaver survey process useful, had used it to inform their work planning and a number intended to repeat the process on an, at least, annual basis.

Review the role and experience of Personal Advisers

- Not all LAs carried out a specific review of the PA role during the NB programme timeframe. Some reported that they were satisfied that the role was already working well or that they regularly reviewed the role as part of usual service review. In any event, it was apparent that in doing so, a number of issues were identified.
- First, the capacity and availability of PAs to develop and maintain relationships with their young people was highlighted. Many young people echoed this view in their survey responses, where they expressed they wanted to see more of the worker but in a flexible and responsive way.
- Second, ensuring the status, skills and training needs of PA were met was considered important to ensuring good quality support to care leavers.
- Third, for a small number of LAs, changing the service delivery model to be more responsive to the needs of care leavers was deemed a priority.

- Examples of work underway to improve the PA role included specific training programmes, restructuring of a service to reduce or realign caseloads and delivering young person-led training to raise awareness of how leaving care can impact on an individual level.

Care leaver forum

- The vast majority of NB LAs had a care leaver forum operating over the duration of the NB year although some of these pre-dated NB whilst others were newly established.
- Many LAs and young people commented on the desire to extend the membership of the forum to include more young people. LAs had ideas about how to recruit young people including improving communication on the purpose and work of forum and exploring with engaged members of the forum how to encourage other young people to take part.
- Some LAs were diversifying the ways in which care leavers could engage so that young people had control to choose how to participate and share views.
- Some barriers to effective forums were identified including resources to fund the forum, young people's availability and accessibility in terms of timing and geography.
- The NB care leaver forums were at different stages in their development in terms of facilitation, links with decision makers, delegated budget and effectiveness of the 'feedback loop'.
- There was evidence of the positive impact forums and other types of care leaver groups could have on care leavers themselves as well as other young people and the wider community, including corporate parents.

Develop multi-agency work plans

- The vast majority of NB LAs developed a local plan based on the results of their care leaver survey. The development of the plans took longer than expected.
- Some plans were combined with existing improvement plans but it was reported as positive that NB maintained a focus on care leavers during wider improvement work across an LA.
- There was evidence that some, though definitely not all, had started to address the top areas identified in both the care leaver survey and gold standard areas

Ensure strategic commitment

- There was high support across respondents for increasing the direct involvement of care leavers in corporate parenting structures and increasing the number and quality of interactions between senior decision makers and young people.
- There was a mixed picture in terms of how much progress had been made in this area.
- Where it had occurred, benefits were plentiful to both the young person, senior staff and the quality of the work.
- Barriers included staff turnover, the amount of leverage some leaving care staff had in reaching the decision makers and the wider workload for authorities.
- There was also an issue of a lack of knowledge within the wider corporate parenting community of the particular needs (and indeed strengths) of care leavers and how best to support them.

Delivering the NB programme

- Overall, there were mixed experiences of implementing the individual components of the programme.
- On balance there was a high level of engagement across most of the 28 LAs during Phase 2 of the NB programme.
- There was mixed use of the NB team of facilitators and panellists; a particular barrier was the matching of the panellist to areas as some were at distance which at times inhibited how often and how in-depth they could work with the authority and their young people. Careful matching of panellists was needed to ensure success of the model.
- The panellist role brought a range of benefits to the LAs, to young people in the LAs and clusters and also to the panellists themselves. The role had afforded the opportunity to gain confidence, work skills, knowledge and experiences. It had also brought young people a sense of achievement and of being taken seriously.
- Facilitators were generally valued and welcomed for their support, experience and broad range of expertise. Some felt that facilitators were useful for keeping work on track. Not all LAs were universally positive and noted difficulties in contacting their facilitator and receiving documents in time.
- Generally, the ‘critical friend’ role provided by NB was valued though there were complaints at times about the volume of reporting requirements and communication issues.

4. Chapter four. Progress in local authorities during the New Belongings year.

Having described how the different components of the NB model were working in the LAs and having considered what helped or hindered this (chapter three) the evaluation next explored whether there was evidence of progress in the gold standard areas in the LAs over the course of the NB programme. This chapter brings together emerging evidence of change. It considers findings within the context of timescales, resources and the wider environment that affected the extent to which LAs were able to implement NB and evidence impact.

4.1 Local authority performance at follow up

As discussed in Chapter two, 19 LAs completed the self-assessment tool at baseline and just under half (47%) were considered 'good' in relation to the gold standard areas while a similar percentage (53%) were doing 'ok' (see Table 8). In order to understand whether the LAs made progress over time in relation to how they rated themselves in the 10 gold standard areas, all 19 LAs that had completed the baseline self-assessment were invited to complete an abbreviated version of the self-assessment at the end of the programme, an average of six months after baseline completion (see Appendix 1 for more information on the methodology and Appendix 2 for a copy of the self-assessment tool). Only 10 of the original 19 LAs responsed by completing an abbreviated version of the self-assessment tool at follow-up.

The follow-up self-assessment provided the LA with their original score out of 10 for each gold standard area at baseline and asked respondents to rate their current performance in relation to that. The scores for the 10 gold standard areas were then summed to provide a score out of 100 for both baseline and follow-up.

Six months is a relatively short period for change to take place. Nevertheless, the self-assessment tool suggests a perceived improvement in performance during NB involvement for nearly all of those taking part in the programme, with those LAs with the lowest scores at baseline reporting particular improvements (see Table 9).

Table 9 Local authority change over time

LA id code	Status at baseline	Score at baseline	Score at follow-up	Direction of Change	Change score
16	doing well	82	82	same	0
18	doing ok	58	61	higher	3
15	doing well	76	81	higher	5
10	doing ok	77	84	higher	7
3	doing ok	70	77	higher	7
4	doing ok	65	73	higher	8
13	doing well	69	78	higher	9
26	doing well	71	81	higher	10
27	doing ok	54	69	higher	15
19	doing ok	58	82	higher	24

4.1.1 Factors that helped local authorities to make progress in the gold standard areas

When completing the abbreviated self-assessment, the LAs were asked to comment on what had helped with service progress over the time period. The factors identified by LAs as impacting on improvement in the gold standard areas were unsurprisingly multiple and cumulative. They also replicated the factors identified throughout this report as being necessary for implementing change (whether embedding the NB programme or facilitating service improvement). Here we explore LA views of what helped them to make progress in the gold standard areas.

As noted above, the NB programme did not operate in a vacuum. As such, LAs highlighted the effect that wider policy developments and strategies over recent years were having on the continued reshaping and delivery of services and support. In one, the Care Leavers Charter was considered instrumental in improvements in gold standard area 2, resulting in better information guides and resources to ensure that care leavers were supported and informed (LA 19). Embedding Staying Put was also impacting on improved preparation and planning with several LAs highlighting it as the driver for improvements in gold standard area 9 and, as was the case for LA 03, in contributing to improvements in gold standard area 6 (the ability to provide safe and settled accommodation for care leavers).

Progress was also attributed to existing initiatives such as the FromCare2Work programme for improving young people's options and access to work experience placements (LA 16), and the wider use of the 'Get Ready for Adult Life' materials to bring about improvements in preparation and skills development (gold standard area 9) as was the case for LA 15. Ofsted inspections were also highlighted as drivers for change,

> *'you know the big driver for that [improvement] is Ofsted, to keep us going and that's the real lever as well as outcomes for care leavers must be the number one principle, but you want to be doing well'.* (LA 10)

The influence of the NB programme was also palpable. As discussed earlier in Chapter three, LAs highlighted the impact of the NB care leaver survey both as a mouthpiece for young people to share views, experiences and concerns about leaving care and as a means of helping services to identifying priorities for development.

> *'We are tuned to young people's views and work hard to co-produce our priorities, action plans and improvements. Our complaints have reduced as we have better relationships'. (LA 15)*

NB had also provided an impetus for increased opportunities for care leavers to share their views and for corporate parents to hear them, as discussed earlier, through the creation of new care leaver forums or giving existing forums more resources, attention and status.

This had resulted in greater awareness:

> *'NB helped to put care leavers on the counsellor and senior manger's radar [and] care leavers were invited to corporate parenting events….and a care leaver's forum set up'. (LA 19)*

> *'Corporate parents now understand the needs and experiences of care leavers, the focus on them, both in the Ofsted development plan and with NB supporting this, there are now more care leavers in touch with the participation team, which enables them to have their voices heard'. (LA 27)*

Practice example:
Setting up a care leaver forum for the first time

In one authority the agreed priority in their NB plan was 'consultation with care leavers'. Although there had been discussion with young people at an individual level there was no clear process in place for collective consultation or communicating the views of care leavers to corporate parents. During the NB year the authority secured funding for a worker to establish and facilitate a care leaver forum, drafted terms of reference and worked towards a sustainable model of consultation. As a result, it was reported that:

> '*care leavers engaged with the forum are developing their understanding of how they can scrutinise, reflect on and challenge 'the way things are''*

(LA final progress report)

Increasing the opportunities for young people's participation had contributed to overall improvements in gold standard area 1, 'responsiveness to the views of care leavers'. As we described earlier, some LAs had committed to re-running the care leaver survey to ensure that young people's contribution to service review and development was regularly captured.

> *'[We've] responded to one of the key findings from the 2015 survey around preparation for independence [and] we agreed to re-run the survey of children in care and care leavers'. (LA 3)*

Other examples included young people creating a guide to leaving care and a corporate parent pledge to care leavers (LAs 13 & 23).

There was also evidence that the areas highlighted by the care leaver survey and the self-assessment tool as being in greatest need of attention at baseline had started to be addressed. For example, LAs highlighted service improvement over the follow-up period in preparation support (which had been identified as one of the lowest scoring gold standard areas (See chapter two). This included the use of training materials and upskilling foster and residential carers in a common approach to support their young people to develop independent skills (LA 15) and working with partner agencies such as housing and health services to develop training courses for young people (LA 3).

Several LAs had responded to young people's requests for the more gradual transition that was echoed across the care leaver surveys. They did this by, for example, introducing 'training' or taster flats and a wider range of supported accommodation options to provide young people with the opportunity for a *'rehearsal'* for independent living

> *'A training flat is now in place and this is now open to young people'.*

'We have made great strides with choice and range of accommodation to meet young people's needs, staying put is embedded and we have increased post 18 supported lodgings, shared accommodation and starter flats'. (LA 15)

There was also evidence of the impact of NB on senior management, strategic buy-in and wider LA awareness, due to the increased profile afforded to leaving care issues through the NB programme. One LA described the impact of their efforts to keep care leavers on the corporate agenda:

'The big thing is we've put care leavers on the map, or the beginning of the map. 12 months ago our economic regeneration team had never heard of care leavers and now I go to the meetings and they say, "oh here she is", you know, it's care leavers, care leavers, so they have got it, the assistant chief executive's got it and departments phone us now and say we've got apprenticeships coming up is there any of your care leavers for us?' (LA 10)

Shared learning and collaborative and joint working via the NB cluster relationships had also helped to drive forward developments to improve provision.

Alongside these improvements, LAs cited a number of obstacles to achieving greater progress. These most commonly involved a lack of resources either through diminishing finances or limited or changing access to housing stock '*reductions in the range of options has impacted on being able to find the right accommodation'* (LA 18). A perceived negative impact of some national and local policies, such as benefits sanctions, was also mentioned as presenting barriers to improving the leaving care experience.

4.2 Corporate parents: changes in approach to care leavers over the past year

One of the necessary factors in facilitating change for care leavers was the degree of engagement and support from corporate parents. To try and understand whether there had been any changes in corporate parents' awareness and work in relation to care leavers during in the year that NB had been in operation, respondents to our survey of other corporate parents were asked to indicate their agreement with the statements listed in table 10 using a four-point scale from 0 (not at all), to four (very much so).

The number of respondents to the corporate parenting survey was very low (11). However, responses show around half of those who took part felt there had been an increased awareness of the needs of care leavers to some extent, with some reporting that this was strongly evident. There were more mixed findings in relation to whether it was perceived that care leavers had been consulted more. Finally, respondents generally felt that NB had influenced their work at least to some extent but respondents were less

certain as to whether things had improved substantially for their care leavers (see Table 10).

Table 10 The views of corporate parents

Over the past year	0 Not at all	1	2 to some extent	3	4 Very much so
There has been increased awareness of the needs of care leavers	0	0	27%	27%	46%
There has been increased consideration of the needs of care leavers in policy and practice developments within my service/department	9%	0	9%	27%	55%
There has been an increase in the extent to which the needs of care leavers have impacted upon decisions and work undertaken by my service/department	0	10%	10%	20%	60%
There has been an increase in the extent to which we have consulted with care leavers	0	9%	19%	36%	36%
NB has influenced the way my service/department works with care leavers	0	0	50%	30%	20%
Things have got better for care leavers in this authority	9%	9%	36%	9%	36%

Source: CP Survey May 2016

4.3 Summary points for Chapter four

- The self-assessment tool was originally completed by 68% of NB LAs at baseline and provided a useful snapshot of the extent to which they were providing a gold standard service to care leavers.
- Responses suggested that 47% (9) of LAs could be categorised as ‘good’ at baseline and 53% (10) were ‘doing ok’ at baseline in terms of their performance in relation to the gold standard areas.

- The self-assessment was completed again around six months later to look at change in how LAs rated their performance. The direction of travel during the NB programme for those reviewing their performance at follow-up was positive with all bar one reporting an improvement in provision. This was particularly true of those LAs scoring lowest at baseline, suggesting that service improvement support such as that offered by NB might be particularly effecting in helping struggling and failing services to improve.
- The views of corporate parents presented a more mixed picture (although low numbers were involved in the survey). Most stated that there had been progress, at least to some extent but areas for improvement included the extent to which the LA consulted with care leavers.
- Factors that helped LAs progress with the gold standard areas included the core components of the NB approach (in particular the care leaver survey and requirement to have a separate forum). There was some evidence of LAs beginning to target the areas which LAs had rated themselves less effective.
- There are limits to the amount of data on progress available within the evaluation. In particular, the fact that not all LAs completed a self-assessment or took part in the corporate parenting survey is restrictive. As discussed previously, the self-assessment tool upon which the progress measures as based is relatively untested and requires further refining to check its suitability as a tool for measuring change.

5. Chapter five. What facilitated progress in the New Belongings local authorities?

'I think the new belongings methodology is really good, I'm really pleased with it and it's something that I will use in the future. It gives you focus, the monthly phone calls were brilliant, helped us focus in on the tasks and the 10 milestones in particular made you focus in, though in the end we've had to say we can't do everything, but we've done as much as we can in the 12 months, there's operational issues to overcome, but it's sustainability ..this work doesn't stop on March 31st, so I think new belongings has given us the framework we needed to really put care leaves on the map'. (Manager. Telephone interview)

'Our care leaver sub-judgement from Ofsted was inadequate, so in lots of ways that brought care leaver issues into sharp focus – others who maybe didn't think part of their job so it was a call to action, New Belongings assisted with that'. (Manager, telephone interview)

One of the aims of the evaluation was to explore the ways in which NB might be impacting on local authority provision to care leavers. Having looked in detail at what the NB programme involved and what was needed to embed it within practice (Chapter three) and at emerging progress (Chapter four), we now consider what might enable programmes to make a difference to service provision.

This chapter draws together the available evidence from the document review, interviews with LA representatives, focus groups and the survey of corporate parents (CP), to describe the key enablers and barriers to progress in the LAs. The chapter also explores some of the ideas and strategies that LAs used to overcome barriers. To do this it focuses on impact and influence of the following factors in enabling progress:

- Strength of young people's voice
- Cluster approach
- National profile of New Belongings
- Implementation timescales
- Host environment and corporate parenting.

5.1 Strength of young people's voice

'[Ensuring] *Care leavers' views are heard is the central point, all the others can branch from it…all others* [gold standard items] *are pointless without the views been heard first, as unless their views are heard they* [LA] *won't be able to find out*'. (Young people's focus group)

A central feature of the NB model was the extent to which young people had influenced service design. For the NB facilitators, this was the key element in which they expected, and sought, most progress from their LAs as it was considered to be the foundation for building change.

> *'If they* [LA] *make progress in engagement of care leavers this is enough for us, and as a result changing culture, as this shift by itself is enough to do other things in the future,* [it] *doesn't matter if not doing anything else. If they can do one thing, improve engagement and listening to care leavers, then that will still be a success'.* (Facilitator focus group)

As described earlier (chapter 3), all LAs were consulting with their care leavers to varying degrees via the care leaver survey and by introducing or strengthening care leaver forums. There was also evidence that young people's voices were influencing progress and service delivery.

It was evident from the views of the young people and service staff gathered through the evaluation that LAs were at different starting points in terms of ensuring that care leavers' views were central in informing and influencing service provision. There were, however, examples of where young people's views and input had explicitly influenced the work being undertaken.

> *'The New Belongings survey identified some key themes that weren't fully addressed in our existing care leavers' improvement plan, which in its first year was mainly focussed on recommendations from the Ofsted report. Care leavers told us …that the quality and suitability of their accommodation was impacting on their ability to lead happy, successful lives. The concerns about accommodation have led to a cross-council project to re-commission the housing options for care leavers and to provide a supportive pathway that prepares them for independent living'.* (LA final review report)

Increasing opportunities to meet with care leavers face-to-face and directly involving them in meetings and other activities had been an important enabling factor in getting decision makers on board with making changes. Hearing directly from care leavers had helped to challenge negative stereotypes and raised awareness of the concerns and needs of 'service users. This had enabled their views to be taken seriously as young people had brought their passion and personal experiences to the discussion.

> '*Look at what care leavers can do and the skills they have and their huge potential, rather than looking just at the fact they may not have got a certain qualification, and emphasising how the service can help tailor opportunities'.* (LA 23)

> *'The young people have spoken directly to the staff group supporting them; eloquently explaining that best intention is not good enough. As professionals we need to be creative and open to the changing needs of our young people. For some workers this*

has meant a cultural change which has been challenging at times but rewarding in the end'. (LA final review report)

Practice example:
Challenging the stereotypes

Young people in one of the focus groups considered the NB programme to have contributed to raising the profile of care leavers by bringing a focus within the local authority:

'It's a really good project… that has impacted a lot of young people really, maybe care leavers will start realising that yeh this is a step forward, we can be the ones that are gonna change the, how shall we say, the stigma and social media of care leavers and that we matter'.

There was an acknowledgement that these were '*early days*' and more needed to be done to encourage more young people in and leaving care to participate in forums '*get it on facebook so more people can get to know about them'*, and that there was a long journey ahead in implementing the changes that had been identified and presented to their corporate parents *'obviously we are just starting to make the changes now but by the end of this year the changes will have been put into place'.* (YP focus group)

More innovative mechanisms for utilising young people's expertise and voice were also apparent. This included the Young Inspector Project, *'[it} successfully completed inspections in semi-independent accommodation and children's homes in the first and second quarter of the New Belongings project. The Young Inspectors project will be continued and a new cohort of young people will be trained in mid-2016'* (LA final progress report).

In some of the LAs for example, 'care leaver ambassador' roles had been developed, which *'offered paid work and ongoing opportunities to influence and work together with services to maintain care leaver voice at the centre of service planning'* (e.g. LA 14; LA 23).

Practice example:
Care leaver ambassadors

In order to better engage with care leavers, one authority described how they had recruited five Care Leaver Ambassadors on part time contracts with the council. This process involved some quite complex negotiations with the HR department, followed by a series of adverts and then an interview process which led to the appointment of the ambassadors. The ambassadors then underwent a programme of induction and training.

The care leaver ambassadors were reported to be already building positive relationships with other care leavers in order to support and empower them to share their views, opinions and experiences, and assisting in planning and co-ordination of the care leaver forums. They were also assisting in developing information for care leavers, and had a role in representing of other care leavers to decision-makers at local, regional and national level. (LA final review report)

Such examples demonstrated that young people were not only having their say but that what they were saying was having an impact and enabling progress. Young people in one of the focus groups felt that things had improved over the NB year.

> *'Before it wasn't considering what we wanted,* [it] *was more this is what happened since last meeting…*[now] *you hear what actions are going to be taken and how care leavers can help with those actions, things we can do to support the council. Feels like you are a part of it rather than just sat listening to what happened. It feels different to me'.* (Young person focus group)

There was a sense that this two-way exchange was essential to improving circumstances for care leavers. One young person explained that by sharing views and experiences, care leavers can help corporate parents to better understand and in turn better support care leavers, '*They should be asking what we can do to help them [understand] so that they can then help us, if we help them, they can help us*'. (YP focus group, LA 10)

Increasing participation

The key barrier to harnessing the power of young people's voices was engagement of young people in such processes and making sure that engagement was meaningful and had an impact.

Those involved in the NB programme were aware, and to varying degrees concerned, that they were only reaching, listening to and working with a small segment of their care leavers. The numbers bore this out; often it was a low proportion of young people who attended forums or contributed to feedback and the care leaver's survey results indicated low response rates. This suggests limitations in both the reach of the NB programme

and in wider participation activities. Ways of overcoming this included actively seeking representation from more vulnerable groups.

Practice example:

Reaching more young people

The creation of young people's forums, coupled with strategies to encourage participation and engagement, had provided opportunities to hear from care leavers from a wide range of experiences and backgrounds, including traditionally hard to reach young people, such as those with mental health difficulties and young offenders.

> 'W*ith these [forums] you need people with a vary* [sic] *of knowledge so like [young person] is mental health, mine's about employment'.*

This had helped to increase the visibility of such groups and the specific issues they encountered as care leavers. Being heard, and '*not judged and knocked down'* not only gave a validity to each experience but also impacted on young people's confidence and sense of inclusion,

'*Things like this [forum] are good for people like [them] who can come along and they can have an input'.* (YP focus group)

The use of information leaflets, launch events, social media and the use of apps was also used to increase participation:

> *'Communication and information sharing with care leavers has been a major challenge and we have been exploring ways to engage young people through the use of social media. We have had two productive meetings of the Social Media group and together with care leaver representatives we have now agreed some keys actions in developing an open Facebook page. This will act as a virtual noticeboard for care leavers, sharing information about schemes, offers and opportunities. Branding has been agreed following ideas and suggestions from care leavers and we are now considering next steps with promoting the page. This will include a page launch with Personal Advisors so that they can promote the page when they meet with their young people'.* (LA final review report)

> *'We have been working hard to develop our engagement with young people so its representative of all voices. We have moved away from a traditional group meeting to reaching out to offer young people a range of engagement choices that suits them and their needs for example; one to one meet ups, Facebook, email, small topic focus groups, surveys etc. Our care experienced facilitator is now based with our care leaver team a day a week offering joint visits with personal advisers for harder to reach young people'.* (LA final review report)

Things that facilitated meaningful engagement included having a young persons' work plan, which gave work more focus and direction so that young people could see progress and tick off actions as they were achieved. Young people were also more actively involved in co-chairing meetings and developing agenda items, which appeared to lead to an enhanced sense of ownership of the work.

5.2 Cluster approach

New Belongings provided the structure and opportunity to share learning across LAs. At a regional level, this was facilitated though clusters of NB LAs. Each cluster held regular meetings (every two to three months), which were usually attended by representatives from the NB team. The clusters were tasked with creating an overarching plan aligned, but separate to the individual LA plans. In addition, each LA took a lead on a particular topic such as health or accommodation.

5.2.1 Providing peer challenge

Data from the evaluation suggested that, for the majority of LAs, the opportunity to work with other LAs in these partnership (clusters) proved to be particularly useful in supporting their improvement drive. At times it was described as the main highlight, or 'best thing' about their experience of the NB programme (LA 26).

> *The key for success is the cluster. This has ensured full engagement with the process and has set realistic timescales for each of the local authorities to set up new initiatives and feedback.* (LA final review report)

Working together in this way was described as preventing the isolation that leaving care services and their managers can sometimes feel when there are few other equivalent colleagues working with care leavers within an authority (LA 4, LA16). Being able to share ideas, challenges and solutions with external colleagues who were immersed in the issues proved both an efficient and effective benefit of the opportunities afforded by cluster working.

Features of cluster working that were particularly appreciated included the additional accountability that came from working with peers. Or, as one respondent explained, '*a bit of competition which drives you on'* (LA 26). As part of this, one LA acknowledged that impending cluster meetings provided them with refreshed impetus in their work. They noted that as the date of the cluster meeting approached, they were keen to ensure their plans had moved on so that they could positively report back to colleagues on progress (LA11).

'There were real strengths in having the opportunity to work within our cluster group, which consisted of neighbouring authorities. While organisational structures were different and care leaver services were delivered through different models, the issues and challenges which impacted upon our care leavers were very similar. There were a range of strengths in the different areas and we were able to learn from each other's examples of good practice and provide a peer challenge role'. (LA final review report)

Other benefits from cluster working that were well regarded included the opportunity to assess and benchmark how LAs was progressing in comparison to others. At times this healthy competition could prove motivating and reassuring, particularly when an authority realised they were doing well in compared to others (LA 11).

5.2.2 Sharing ideas and resources

'We have started researching having an electronic presence, so we can continue to educate young people on their entitlements based on learning from another authority at the New Belongings dissemination event'. (LA final review report).

Working in clusters had enabled a structure for sharing practice more effectively. The majority of LAs experienced positive and effective joint working, which had led to the development of shared policies, visits to partner LAs to attend meetings, view practice, share advice, support and peer challenge over the course of the year. This activity had been well regarded and thought to have helped in the development, streamlining and progressions of work plans and service development ideas.

LAs commented on being able to use the experience of another LA to introduce changes in their practice. At times, this had been fuelled by a sense that things that had previously been thought unattainable or too difficult were in fact possible; '*If they can do it, then we can do it here too'*. LAs seemed to gain confidence and belief that progress was achievable as more was learnt about how others had succeeded and LAs could see both that it *could* be done and importantly understand more about *how* it could be done. As one respondent said, working with those who had achieved something '*gave us the 'oomph' to think we can do it too'* (LA24).

'I would say that working as part of a cluster has accelerated progress and improvements as we share materials and resources with each other. It has helped to keep focus and enthusiasm committed to aspiring to improve services and pushed each other with at times high support and high challenge'. (LA final review report)

The benefits of cluster working extended to young people's experiences. Young people who took part in the focus groups endorsed the value of shared learning and argued for more opportunities to meet and work with young people from other areas.

Practice example: Shared learning from the cluster and wider NB members

> *'NB is a place where young people can voice their opinions but it's also a place where other organisations, like local authorities can come together and talk about what's going good in their area and what's bad and what changes need to be made to the system in improving finances, mental health, housing...it's a conference, it's corporate parents, its young people'. (*YP focus group LA 10)

In describing the NB programme and its impact, one of the young people's focus groups highlighted the benefit of having access to examples of existing and developing practice in other LAs to support care leavers. This '*knowledge*' could be used in their own local authority to compare services and to lobby for and inform improvements to their own services, '*look, if they can do it why can't we*?'

> '*It's about looking at other* [LAs] *to look at what they do different and what we can take from them, so for example one of the places they had a finance pot for young people when they left care so if they were in times of need or struggle they can …take some out of the funds and we don't have anything like that at the moment, it's very hard, like getting blood out of a stone'. (*YP focus group, LA 10)

The young people's focus group felt that collaborations and networks between care leaver forums across the programme had been facilitated by the NB clusters and NB conferences that took place to showcase the work of other NB local authorities. Having contact with care leavers from different local authorities helped with sharing experiences and ideas,

> '*I've got a very close partnership now with [name of other LA] and their care leavers, now we discuss what they've got and how good it is for their young people and I'm hoping to try some of things that they have there for our young people, bus passes, trips, community centre drop-in specifically for care leavers'*. (YP focus group LA 10)

This had resulted in plans to set up a similar type of community drop-in for care leavers for young people to come along and meet others and to seek support from staff and peers with any issues:

> '*Opening a place like that is going to bring in people and let them express what changes they want made and it shows you've got the support there and [*our leaving care manager] *has said that if we can get it up and running we could bring in educational advice and support an education course'.*

(YP focus group LA 10)

5.2.3 Working across boundaries

Through working in clusters a small number of LAs had started to explore whether they could adopt a more common and flexible response across traditional service boundaries by establishing reciprocal arrangements. In this sense LAs could maximiseresources and opportunities. Some of these developments included work to look at housing for care leavers who move between areas, provision of leisure facilities across LAs, and sharing apprenticeship opportunities within the cluster consortium.

> *'As a direct result of the project we have agreed within our cluster they would be willing to extend reciprocal arrangements amongst the areas should it meet the individual need. Discussions are already in place to achieve this for one young person*'. (LA final review report)

5.2.4 Improving cluster work

Although many LAs had experienced the cluster model as an enabler to progress, this was not the case for all. In some cases the cluster approach had not been as effective or useful. One LA reported that the activity in their cluster had felt '*tokenistic'*, with limited meetings, visits and no discernible joint work. They reflected that this may have been due to the different starting points of the LAs (LA 14). Another commented that during the NB programme their priority had been to mainly focus on 'in-house' activity rather than dedicate too much time to the cluster (LA 8).

The care leaver panellist focus group reiterated that whilst cross LA working had expedited the work of some, for others it may have 'slowed it down'. They questioned whether the progress of some Phase 1 LAs may have been impacted by being placed in clusters with LAs who were new to NB, as it inevitably took time for all LAs to 'come up to speed' with the NB approach.

LAs seemed to have mixed views on the preferred configuration for clusters. Geography was a prime factor for consideration as well as the mix of LAs with one authority advocating the need for close comparators (LA 16) and another arguing it was useful to have a range with both those who were further on in their improvement journey as well as those rated poorly, the latter of which would have something to aspire to within the cluster as well as some to relate to (LA 26). There was evidence that many of the LAs were planning to continue working together, either through the peer support networks they had developed or through more tangible activities such as cross- boundary or multi-LA initiatives.

5.3 The National profile and reach of New Belongings

> *I'd done a lot of voluntary work in [my] council and realised it was not making a difference* – [LA would] *listen to you, say that sounds terrible and then nothing happens but New Belongings seemed like a real opportunity to help on a national scale. I was shocked to find that local authorities wanted to improve* (Care leaver panellist focus group)

For some LAs there was a strong sense that being part of a large national programme that involved a high number of other leaving care services that was funded by government brought a degree of kudos that had helped move things on in their area (LA 15).

Being part of a programme brought expectations from the NB team (and, as we saw also from other cluster LAs) that things needed to progress. Sitting alongside this were accompanying governance and feedback arrangements to check things had happened in a timely manner. As such, some LAs saw that: '*New Belongings can be another tool in an authority's toolkit.* For some it appeared that being part of a wider programme helped them to keep the focus in their LA on care leavers and their voice in times of competing pressures and priorities and that this had been welcomed (LA 6).

> *'New Belongings has provided the political and organisational focus and spotlight on care leavers which has raised awareness and momentum for improving services for care leavers as a corporate parent'.* (LA final review report)

Having the DfE involvement was a potential source of additional leverage that LAs could use to encourage 'buy-in' and approval within their council (LA 23) and at times, was a way of giving staff more influence to make changes (Facilitator focus group). Some LAs used such leverage to maintain momentum.

> *'I feel we achieved so much without any major increase in resources because of employee commitment, I feel that the title New Belongings gave us the drive, information and confidence to be persistent when approaching external agencies and/or businesses for support'.* (LA final review report)

The NB programme had a degree of national kudos that came with particular support from the Minister and direct monitoring back to DfE. A couple of LAs cited that NB provided the opportunity to influence the national policy agenda, something that they had reportedly enjoyed (LA 15). Given the high volume of LAs within the programmes (around one-fifth of all LAs took part) there may be advantages in ensuring sufficient resource are available to garner key messages and that these are relayed to government at timely points throughout the programme to inform national developments.

Sharing learning from the NB programme

In addition to profile, it was important that NB had national reach and this relied on capturing and sharing learning.Although opportunities for capturing learning had been built into the NB programme (clusters, reporting and dissemination events), concerns were raised that these had not been efficiently or effectively communicated and were not, therefore, always able to be fed directly into practice.

The challenge of finding effective and reliable ways of capturing learning and practice from those taking part in any programme is one that many projects experience. Yet, it is a vital part of the programme, as was reported in the Phase 1 evaluation, '*it is a false economy not to'* (Lindsey and Stein, 2014). The evaluation of Phase 2 showed that many LAs valued the 'clusters' as a means of sharing learning, however, some respondents felt that more opportunities could have been created to communicate practice, experiences and impact more widely and effectively across all of the 28 LAs *during* the programme, although the two national shared learning events did produce reports to capture the key themes discussed.

The NB team set up an electronic file repository (provided via Sharefile), which was designed as a central place for the NB team and LAs to access up to date plans, progress information and resources. However, from the evaluation interviews it appeared to be underutilised partly because some LAs did not know about it and because information contained within it was sometimes out of date. This is likely to have been a missed opportunity to share information whilst the programme was in action.

Learning from the programme has now been captured in an end of programme guide to New Belongings. This has been designed to aid LAs who wish to undertake the model. Within this, there are 20 examples of 'changing practice' (see Table 11).

Table 11 Examples of Changing Practice in New Belongings Local Authorities

Services Responsive to The Views of Care Leavers

1. Engaging The Care Leaver Community (plus *Young Person's Guide to Leaving Care)*
2. Enhancing Community and Corporate Parenting Through a Pledge Made to Care Leavers
3. Improving Personal Adviser Services

Being Informed and Supported

4. Use of Outcome Star

Educated (to their potential)

5. Education into employment in Pathway plan

Helped into Work (Employability)

6. The National Benefits System for Care Leavers and Job Centre Protocol
7. Apprenticeships
8. Employment and Apprenticeships
9. Employment and preparation for employment

Having Good Health and Well Being

10. Mental Health

Being in Safe and Settled Accommodation

11. Approach to Homelessness and Housing
12. Accommodation Support

Having an Adequate Level of Income

13. Incentivizing Care Leavers: Dealing with Council Tax
14. Assistance to Care Leavers – Emergency and Leaving Care Grants

Having People to Be Able to Count on for Emotional Support

15. Mentoring Scheme
16. Safe Space/Hub for Care Leavers
17. Personal Advisers: A Duty to age 25

Being Able to Manage Day to Day Life

18. Preparation for Leaving Care

Services Used by More Vulnerable Care Leavers

19. Advice to Personal Advisers Working with Care Leavers Who Have Been Asylum Seeking children
20. Teenage Pregnancy Support

5.4 Implementation timescales and resources

The funding available from DfE was for a one year project. There is a limit to what can be achieved in such a timescale when introducing programmes into large and complex environments such as local authorities. As noted earlier, the process of developing and signing off work plans often took much longer than anticipated. During the evaluation LAs were keen to emphasise the limited amount of time actually available to work on New Belongings and thus the need to see much of the work they had done as ongoing. Some felt strongly that a year-long project was insufficient time especially when it can take six months to work out priorities and actions, galvanize support from and engage a range of key partners (LA 6). The effects of the programme were intended to be evident for much longer than just one year.

One authority echoed the sentiments of many when they reflected that a year slides by very quickly (LA 9) especially when you considered that staff had to take annual leave both within the service and across clusters and, as a result, the time actually available for work was limited. As one authority reflected that the work they were undertaking on reviewing their accommodation strategy was likely to have the most tangible impact on their care leavers but conversely it was likely to take the longest time and at the end of Phase 2 they could not yet report on outcomes (LA 13). Another made a similar point about their service design restructure which was in progress and aimed to free up more Personal Adviser time but was taking time as job roles were revaluated and extra staff brought into the service (LA 15).

There were several examples given which demonstrated the amount of the time it can take to implement change and actions in LA settings.

> *'The mentoring programme has been advertised via the Executive Directors blog which is aimed at all staff in the authority. Initial interest was very positive with fourteen staff wanting to mentor care leavers. Unfortunately, there has been a delay in the start date as there is a review of the resources available to operate and risk management. It is hoped that training will commence with the mentors so interest is maintained'.* (LA final review report).

For some of the NB LAs there was a sense that one year had only been enough time to get the basics in place and do the initial components of the NB approach such as the survey and forum, but that now this had been secured or was in progress, the next stage would involve more activity to embed the priorities identified. NB was largely considered a useful companion during the early stage of this journey. In the main, LAs appeared optimistic about potential future impact.

However, for young people the speed of progress could seem slow.

The young people are getting frustrated with the pace of change and that their requests for things changing or moving are not as swift as they would hope. However, for some aspects it requires they participate or become responsible for actions and we are yet to see this happen routinely (LA final review report).

Amount of time available

We feel 12 months, is not sufficient to really embed change. We feel we have made some progress against our plan but we need further time to ensure we have really made change which can be sustained.

The project has been a good opportunity to plan, look at good practice, and share ideas. It has also been very useful in holding us to account and keeping us focused.

We are committed to continuing this work both within the LA but also within our cluster. We feel confident that the relationships we have developed with a core group of care leavers will be sustained beyond the project. They are enjoying some of the roles they have been given i.e. interviewing staff and are keen to ensure we use their feedback to further develop services (LA final review report).

5.4.1 Capacity to embed the New Belongings programme in local authorities

The NB approach required an authority to have the in-house capacity to deliver the different elements of the model. In reality, it was not always possible to achieve this. As was found in the Phase one evaluation 'settled, undistracted teams have consistently got more done, built up better learning and skills and maintained the stronger relationships with care leavers' (Lindsey and Stein 2014). The facilitators observed that during Phase 2 there had been a '*huge number of changes in local authorities, worse than Phase 1 with people leaving or changes to structure'* (Facilitator focus group). Prolonged absences of key staff, role changes and restructuring of teams contributed to delays in undertaking the NB methodology. Whilst some degree of turnover may be inevitable it is essential to combat this possibility by ensuring that a range of people are involved in delivering the work plan so that momentum with activities, as well as 'corporate memory', is not lost if people are absent.

Level of engagement from service

The methodology was simply to be serious, committed and passionate about improving our services for care leavers and we spent the initial part of the project with young people and listening to them about their experiences of our services and seeking their views and feedback about what was important for them to improve, which we used the snap shot survey to also inform.

From the snapshot survey this provided key areas that young people wanted us to improve. We then turned the young people's areas into a multi-agency action plan agreed with partners that was monitored regularly by our Board and corporate parents working group and of course monthly monitoring reports to the NB national team. This was a successful methodology as we have just re-run the cycle of going back to young people again as we draft the next year's action plan for 2016/2017. (LA final review report).

New Belongings was delivered in different ways across the 28 LAs. A key facilitator to progress seemed to be the amount of capacity the NB lead had. One authority reflected that NB had taken up a significant amount of time and this had inevitably impacted on the 'day job' of the person leading the work (LA 14) which had led to some internal tensions about conflicting priorities.

During the NB programme there appeared to be great efforts made by the NB team to keep LAs on track with the project documentation. At times this was experienced by some LAs taking part as an unwelcome pressure, especially the case when LAs could not deliver what was required within the given deadline (LA 26). Although in contrast others used the regular prompts and requests for updates as an opportunity to keep their work moving forward, ensured better accountability and enabled them to review their progress (LA 6, LA 9).

Keeping momentum

The work plan was such a useful tool that once the care leaver forum was established we continued to build on this month on month, therefore during the New Belongings project we continually added to our aims and objectives within our work plan.

We ensured that the work plan was progressed by holding monthly steering group meetings, discussions with young people at the monthly care leaver's forum and participation at, and presentations to, councillors and senior managers on a quarterly basis.

'This project has really helped me drive forward the improvement in service provision as it has highlighted the vulnerabilities and needs for care leavers to senior managers, colleagues and counsellors. Without this project I am unsure that I would have had the extent of senior manager 'buy in' and support when trying to gain extra resources to support the improved outcomes for care leavers '(LA final review report).

5.4.2 Resources

Young people in one of the focus groups were acutely aware that the NB programme and services did not operate in a vacuum and the wider environment of budget cuts could affect the LAs ability to prioritise the NB methodology: '*Cutting to budget getting worse. Be lucky in five years if still have a leaving care grant. Nothing is going to change if we've got cuts'* (YP focus group). Such sentiments were echoed by services:

> *'A challenge going forward will be to ensure the needs of care leavers are understood and met in a climate of diminishing resources. We will increasingly need to pull together to work through challenges and make the most of opportunities going forward. The challenge is also one where we are talking about a relatively small proportion of the total population of young people, so we will keep reminding and working with colleagues to make sure care leavers remain high on people's agendas'.* (LA final review report)

5.5 Strategic buy-in and working together

> *We recently went to the Corporate Parenting panel because what a lot of young people are saying is that we all have corporate parents because we are in foster care but we don't actually know who they are and we don't get to meet them, so we went to a CP panel and they sat and actually listened to what we think about the care system, not what everyone else thinks, but what we think and I was very opinionated on mental health and I told them how it was, how it had been for me'.* (Young person focus group)

Ultimately, a critical factor to progress was whether the host LA was receptive, or otherwise, to the NB programme. Instrumental to this was the commitment of senior leadership.

As discussed in chapter three, there was a mixed picture in terms of the extent to which this evident. For some authorities their priorities had been elsewhere during the NB programme, as one authority reflected they needed to focus on getting the 'nuts and bolts' of a quality service in place for care leavers so whilst strategic buy-in was in theory in place this was not utilised during the NB year as there was not deemed the operational capacity to support this work (LA 03).

Reports from some LAs showed that no, or very limited, leverage from their CEO had been evident over the course of the NB year with no meetings with staff, young people or NB facilitators taking place. This was felt to be a missed opportunity (e.g. LA 4, LA 14, LA 9). In some cases, this was partly attributed to the large number of changes in senior staff and in local elections, which led to changes in councillor representation, contributing to a loss of momentum (LA 6). A consequence of limited interaction with senior colleagues was a reduction in the '*opening of doors to other services',* a key factor for driving forward improvements. One LA reflected that due to limited capacity they had focussed their efforts on getting actions from their plan operational and as a consequence felt there had not been time to engage strategic colleagues as part of the programme, the priority for this authority had been *'to do the doing'*. (LA 14)

In contrast, other LAs had prioritised engagement of strategic leaders, and in many cases they had been on board from the outset, supporting and encouraging the original application to be part of NB. Such LAs had high praise for their senior colleagues, explaining their supportive and proactive approach.

Practice example:
Care leavers meeting senior leaders

Young people in one of the focus groups had recently met with their Chief Executive and explained the sorts of issues they had raised: '*We spoke about council tax – talked about having our own building and getting bus passes'.* They shared the reasons why these things were so important to them detailing the pressure they felt living on a low income and facing high monthly bills (for example, council tax).

'I'm not going to sit there and not eat, I'd rather go to court and tell them in court'

As a group they said that they didn't automatically expect an exemption, but they were keen to explore how to reduce their bill and thought that any reduction shouldn't necessarily be just for care leavers as they knew other people were struggling to pay too.

Young people felt that free (or subsidised) travel passes were vital so that they can get to places; '*if trying to get to job centre, and we've got no money we can't get the bus then we get sanctioned and no credit on phone to ring them, we get sanctioned'.*

Whilst the group felt the council should be able to do these things they were sceptical about whether would actually happen and they struggled to remember what the Chief Executive had said they would do about it. As a group they reflected on ways they could make these requests more likely to happen suggesting one way was simply to ask again or another way was to think of different options for the proposal (e.g. do it half price or a special voucher for discount).

This example shows the potential power of young people having the opportunity to explain what is important to them, how issues affect them on a personal level and to think, ideally in conjunction with services, about solutions. It also shows the need to feedback about progress so that young people are kept updated about progress. (LA focus group)

5.5.1 Engaging partners and the wider community

One authority echoed the sentiments of many when they reflected: '*one thing I've learnt is I can't do it on my own'.* A determining factor in the progress, or otherwise, of NB LAs was the extent to which they had been able to effectively engage their partners and the wider community. One authority described engaging partners as the biggest barrier they had faced in their New Belongings year, in part due to the size and scale across the authority, for example, as there were many housing partners (LA 4).

Whilst it was a challenge to engage senior leaders there was evidence of success. Some of the positive relationships brokered over the year included improved working with Department of Work and Pensions colleagues; credit union; health colleagues, HR

personnel and housing (most frequently mentioned) as well as fostering colleagues, adult learning and education services or adult services often described as previously 'stale' or non-active and more invigorated over the period of New Belongings.

> *'The willingness to listen and offer support has been great from agencies. Sure Start, the local college, youth service and connexions have all offered a positive response to our requests'.* (LA final review report).

> *'The work with young people to prepare them for independence starts from day one in care and we have therefore reviewed our training programme with foster carers to enable them to feel more confident in how they support young people to develop age appropriate independence living skills, financial management and behaviour management'.* (LA final review report).

Whilst there weren't always tangible outcomes yet to report on people did mention progress in their relationships with partners; for example, getting named contacts (LA 24), getting the right people together for themed workshops on care leavers (LA 4) or attending strategic meetings to put care leavers on the agenda. Importantly, one authority had responded to their young people saying they were lonely be building links with the voluntary sector to look at what opportunities were on offer to help young people build their networks of support (LA 9). Others had been talking to colleagues in procurement department to make sure the social value clause of contracts was used to promote opportunities for children in care and care leavers where appropriate (LA 23).

Endorsing what was seen elsewhere in the evaluation, the barriers to providing an effective partnership approach to supporting care leavers included a lack of knowledge of the particular issues experienced by care leavers '*within the local authority there's a lack of specialist knowledge amongst staff*' and *'some corporate parents do not fully understand the barriers facing care leavers'.*

Within the LAs who responded to the corporate parenting survey just under half, 45%, indicated that they were satisfied with their current approach to corporate parenting:

> '*We have endeavoured to revitalise the work of the [CP] panel by a comprehensive training programme and action plan for fellow members which compliments* the work of department teams and services'. (CP survey respondent)

> '*We have developed joint working protocol with our Job centre Plus in line with Government and DWP directives to enable us to register our care leavers as vulnerable claimants with the Social Justice team. As a result, we can register benefits two weeks before our care leavers 18th birthday. This successful partnership means that we are better able to support young people's engagement with employment, education and training opportunities as opposed to focusing on the immediate financial constraints at the point of leaving care. Our care leavers claim is also safeguarded for a period of nine months after first application should they miss any appointment or not adhere immediately to DWP requirements'*. (LA final review report)

Improved relationships with partners

In one authority work had developed with HR colleagues; in order to promote education and employment opportunities a matrix had been developed for young people aged 16+ which facilitated matching young people and potential opportunities within the council.

Work had also been undertaken with procurement colleagues to ensure that large contracts within the Council had an expectation that they would provide work opportunities / experiences for care leavers. Elected members had come forward to offer work experience to Young People. As a result, the LA wide NEET (Not in education, employment or training) strategy had been strengthened and the Deputy Director for Education now chaired the Education of LAC and Care Leavers to ensure a joined up strategic approach for all vulnerable groups. EET targeted monitoring of young people ensured that the LA now had destinations for all of their Care Leavers. EET figures had improved for Care Leavers. (LA final review report).

Improved relationships with partners

One authority had established an academic mentoring pilot in partnership with an organisation based in their locality. An academic mentor was a professional whom the young person could contact for practical support and advice with their university course. Each mentor would be practising in the young person's interested profession or field of work. They would therefore have an understanding of the area of study and could share knowledge of this area. In time it was expected that there could also be opportunities for the young person to view the environment and work in practice through work experience placements and shadowing opportunities. If the current pilot was successful, the authority would be exploring opportunities of allocating an academic mentor to all student care leavers during their university course.

Positive relationships were developing with the in-house Legal services team who had offered work experience placements to care leavers studying subjects related to law or who had an interest in progressing to a career in Law. One young person had already started their placement and the authority had other young people interested in the scheme. (LA final review report).

An areas for development appeared to be the extent to which LAs were working with community partners, though one described how: '*a local restaurateur has offered a Sunday morning every other month for care leavers to come and drop in, have a cooked breakfast and develop their own support groups'.* (LA final review report). Another authority mentioned their burgeoning links with local voluntary sector colleagues to offer

young people opportunities to volunteer in response to young people saying they were 'bored' with nothing to do in local area (LA 24). Others cited that they had received some opportunities from local businesses for young people to undertake work experience, however, the authority had experiences a barrier to this in that the opportunities were always the right ones for some young people; '*biggest gap is work readiness rather than getting opportunities (get up, dress properly) so authority had done work on this to help get young people work ready'.* (LA 8, LA 16 and LA 5)

Getting pledges of support from partners

To raise awareness and to seek practical solutions to the issues identified in the care leaver survey a local NB event was held. It was attended by over 200 staff, partners, Elected Members, the third sector, business sector, local care leavers and members of the central New Belongings team. The event generated numerous offers of support and pledges. It also gave us a better understanding of the needs of care leavers through hearing young people's experiences first hand.

However, a significant subsequent issue identified is that due to the high level of offers of support from partner's extra resource is needed to help effectively coordinate the link between services, council and external partners; to ensure the offers of support can be progressed. (LA final review report).

Only a couple of LAs explicitly mentioned *Access All Areas* and work to review local policies to check they were 'young person friendly' and 'care proofed' (LA 03). However, other LAs did describe work they had been doing which aligned closely with the principles of *Access All Areas* such as looking at council tax policy for care leavers (see NB guide book for 'changing practice example describing some of this work) or as described earlier, the work they were doing to ensure better joined up services and asking partners what their offer was for care leavers.

> *'All departments are encouraged to ask what they can do within their directorate plans to support care leavers and children in local authority care'.* (LA final review report).

Summary points for Chapter five

Strength of young people's voice

- Both LAs and young people appeared to universally appreciate and agree with the strong focus on care leaver voice encapsulated in the NB model.
- There appeared to be varied progress in the extent to which services had been able to translate this principle into practice. Some examples of young people helping to influence service design included meeting direct with decision makers and staff, changes to plans being made as a result of care leaver survey findings, and young people working with LAs on working groups to take forward specific projects.
- Available evidence suggested that young people's voices were directly influencing the service delivery in LAs to varying degrees, with some still at the embryonic stage. In others it was clear that the strength of young people's voice had a real impact and was a key facilitator in the progress of the work.
- In a small number of LAs, the authority had formalised the way care leavers' views were utilised by creating 'ambassador' roles or creating specific projects (more information on this can be found in the NB guide book).
- The advantages to engaging young people were apparent at both an individual (increased confidence for some young people) and service level (challenging stereotypes and informing work).
- For many LAs a challenge remained to increase the number of young people whose voices were actively heard as well as to shift the model of work so that young people were more central in leading and taking ownership of activities.
- In addition, LAs needed to raise the profile of care leavers across their LAs, including within the corporate and social community.

Cluster working

- Overall, the majority of LAs had engaged in the cluster approach and it was generally seen as useful to come together, to listen to each other's experiences and to share recourse. Some clusters had shared policies, visited each over and provided advice, support and peer challenge over the course of the NB year.
- Testament to the success of the cluster approach was the fact that a number of LAs were intending to continue working in this way regardless of whether NB continued (for example, LA 5, LA 24, LA 25, LA 26), with one cluster looking at the feasibility of expanding the work to colleagues across their region.

National profile and reach of the New Belongings programme

- LAs generally found it helpful to be part of a national project. For some this bolstered their identity as being part of something bigger, reduced the sense of working in isolation, and this could help LAs to maintain focus on care leavers despite competing in-house pressures
- Overall, respondents would have liked further opportunities to learn more about what other LAs were doing. The system set up to facilitate this (electronic repository had not worked well). As a result, there is a risk that some learning has not been captured.

Implementation timescales and resources

- Respondents overwhelmingly felt that one year was not sufficient to complete all the work associated with undertaking NB programme.
- Many LAs were intending to continue with the activities they had started and were optimistic that they would see impact from the work as the work continued to progress.
- The capacity to undertaken and embed the NB approach was dependent on wider factors such as the resources (for example, staffing stability) and energy available to implement the changes needed.
- New Belongings operated in a wider context of competing pressures on time and budget cuts.
- At times LAs felt the reporting demands of the project added pressure to their workload; some experienced this as problematic but for others they used the regular reporting requirements as an opportunity to keep their work on track.

Host environment and corporate parenting

- A critical factor to progress was whether the host LA was receptive, or otherwise, to the aims and objectives of the NB programme. Instrumental in this was the commitment of senior leadership.
- In addition a further determining factor to progress was the extent to which authorities had been able to effectively engage their partners and the wider community.
- The least developed area in LAs appeared to be engaging wider community partners such as local people, businesses and community groups. For some, this may be an area that could be developed in the future once they are happy that the core elements for delivering a quality service to care leavers are in place.

6. Chapter six. Conclusion and recommendations from the New Belongings Programme: putting care leavers on the map?

When we spoke with young people in the focus groups and asked them to describe New Belongings and why they had become involved, they told us: '[its] *helping other care leavers; if we say that we are trying to make a difference now for you, then..they'd listen a bit more to care leavers than they would to managers; care leavers working with local authorities to try and improve services…making an impact…an initiative to improve services'.* This evaluation has looked at the success, or otherwise, of their ambitions.

The evaluation found variation across the 28 LAs in the extent to which they were able or willing to commit to the NB programme and, consequently, there was a diverse picture in terms of how fully and successfully the NB methodology was utilised. Though it was apparent that the programme had not worked as well for some, there was clear evidence that in most LAs, the programme (or certainly particular components within it) had been embraced. Most LAs had carried out a survey of their care leavers, established or strengthened their care leaver forums, and had prepared a work plan that identified priority areas for service improvement. Generally, there was a sense that care leavers were becoming more visible; that they were now *'on the map'*.

There were a number of factors that influenced how far the programme had been adopted into LA practice. As discussed, these relied on the strengths and skills of those tasked with taking it forward in and across the LAs, the environment into which the programme was received and the extent to which it was receptive and committed to the particular approach.

One of the aims of NB was to increase '*the extent to which local authorities use the experience and wisdom of care leavers to take decision about the services provided to care leavers'*. The evaluation found that LAs were at different stages in the degree to which young people were actually influencing decision making, and the strength of the links that young people had with their corporate parenting representatives. Where this had been achieved, young people had been given opportunities to meet with committees and boards within the wider council. It had also required a strong and persistent lead and a receptive environment, *'12 months ago…[they] had never heard of care leavers and now I go to meetings … and it's care leavers, care leavers…so they have got it, the assistant chief exec has got it*'.

Those LAs that embraced the key features of the NB programme generally reported that they found the approach helpful. In particular, the cluster working was highly regarded. Evidence pointed to the core components of the NB model as achievable and useful to services that were seeking to improve their offer to care leavers. Within this, the evaluation suggested a number of ways in which the NB methodology might improve to maximise its benefits. These included adopting more inclusive and diverse approaches to

surveying care leavers, to increase the response rate and improve representation form more vulnerable and hard to reach young people. Similarly, young people participating in the evaluation had identified a need and suggested the means of engaging a greater number and diversity of care leavers in the forums. Increasing the reach of the programme to more partners both within the LA and from the community could also increase impact.

The evaluation indicated that the core elements of the NB approach appeared to provide a firm foundation for progress, but that sufficient time was needed to fully understand and undertake the work involved.

Overall, LAs in Phase 2 who showed full or partial commitment could be broadly categorised as having used the NB programme in following ways:

1. To get the basics rights (for example: developing staff knowledge and shared learning; raising awareness of care leavers; ensuring that statutory duties were fulfilled; and putting mechanisms in place for care leavers to contribute and have their voices heard and acted upon)
2. To innovate and stretch themselves (for example: look at the responsiveness of their delivery model and adapt it accordingly to the needs of care leavers; explore and/or introduce new ways of working within their service; to actively include partners within their own LA and to join with external partners, such as other LAs, to make better use of provision and resources)

Evidence from implementing the NB programme within LAs had also highlighted a number of barriers to improving support to care leavers. Amongst these were diminishing or limited resources (such as access to funding for activities, which could include care leaver groups); staff capacity (linked to the stability of management and staff working with care leavers and general workloads and priorities); and the degree to which LAs could secure '*buy-in from some departments'.*

Other issues were located within young people's own experiences, their readiness or willingness to engage with opportunities created, as well as the lack of support available to them post-18 from wider services. Additionally, in order to facilitate a successful NB approach, it was clear that 'high level' permission was needed as well as adequate time and resources.

Where data was available, the self-assessment tool (created by the evaluation for LAs to rate their performance in the gold standard areas at baseline and follow-up) showed some evidence of progress across the LAs. Despite this, the pace of change was, for some, deemed too slow. For example, young people and staff expressed frustration at the time needed to action ideas and get sign off for work plans or activities.

An important factor, acknowledged by both the NB team and LAs themselves, was that the NB programme did not exist in a policy and practice vacuum but within a wider package of change and service development. As such, evidence suggested that the NB programme had served to support progress rather than necessarily create change. A

common message from the interviews with LA staff was that NB was a useful source of support that had brought enthusiasm and encouragement whilst change was taking place and had provided a framework to keep things on track. Furthermore, through the methodology, NB ensured that young people remained central to the process as changes took place.

On balance, therefore, the NB methodology appeared to have the potential to support and also hasten progress. In the case of the latter, this was especially achieved through partnership working in clusters, which could accelerate learning and streamline systems by evidencing the experiences of partner LAs so as not to reinvent the wheel.

Young people, via the survey and forums, and LAs, via their self-assessments, identified similar areas where services were perceived to be performing poorly and attention was needed. Top of the agenda for many was improving preparation for independent living for care leavers. Related to this was addressing the stark degree of loneliness and isolation identified by care leavers as a significant problem.

The gold standard area that LAs, as a group, felt had not been sufficiently progressed, was support with health and wellbeing. Despite this consensus, not all LAs had focussed their attention on these areas. For those that had not yet progressed them, reasons were linked to the fact that some needed first to address more basic areas of delivery, the 'nuts and bolts', such as ensuring that entitlements were understood and that PA relationships with young people were adequately in place before they were able to tackle other areas.

The evaluation aimed to illustrate some of the types of activity undertaken by the LAs, rather than replicate the more detailed accounts provided in LA and programme documentation and reports. New Belongings captured some of this work through their shared learning events and end of project guide book (New Belongings Guide 2016), though some participants felt that there could have been improvements to the ways in which work was captured and fed back during the life of the NB programme.

A key step in the NB programme was '*to ensure that local authorities engage all services of the authority and its partners in providing excellent services and support to care leavers in their transition and subsequently*'. The evidence gathered showed the overall reach of the programme was limited to a limited number of care leavers in each LA and that NB LAs had not yet stretched far enough to engage all necessary partners. Engagement with community partners appeared to be the most underdeveloped area.

Overall, and within the limited timeframe and resources, there were benefits to those LAs participating in the NB programme, together with evidence of impact at both the service level as well as at the individual level:

> *'I think personally New Belongings given me help with employment opportunities and different things I could do – when you are in school you think your grades mean everything, and you can't apply for certain job if don't have grades, when in actual fact you may have a lot of experience which actually tops someone who has the grades for it. Am realising, not just with New Belongings, but with other*

groups as well, that experience counts for a lot and being a part of things and volunteering, things to put on your CV, helps to build your character and helped build mine for who I am and for things that I'm hopefully going on to do'. (Young person in focus group)

Taking the New Belongings model forward

Those taking part in the evaluation were asked about their future plans. Many said they were planning to continue the cluster work. A number were continuing with their work plan to finish actions that were part completed or developing new plans for the coming year. Others were committed to re-running the care leaver survey and a small number said they would revisit the self-assessment tool to track their progress. This demonstrated that certain components of the overall methodology had been valued and utilised to support progress.

Many LAs were intending to continue using components of the methodology to progress their work and were optimistic that they would see impact from the work. There was, however, uncertainty amongst some of LA staff leading programme, in whether they would be able to continue responsibility for the work. In addition, three LAs explicitly said that they did not feel the need to join a further phase of the programme.

At the time of the evaluation there were no confirmed plans for a third phase. The LAs, NB team and young people had subsequently expressed concern, to different degrees, about embedding the legacy of their work and sustaining the momentum and changes they had achieved.

At the end of Phase 2 the challenge remained for authorities to develop their work beyond simply listening to the views of young people's towards fully engaging with them and establishing the mechanisms for the LA as a whole to act upon them.

There was also a developing body of shared learning, practice examples and recommendations for non-participating LAs to make use of, through the New Belongings Guidebook and the continued networking and peer support embedded within the clusters and cross boundary working.

In addition, the evaluation identified a number of recommendations and learning points that local authority staff, care leaver forums, the new belongings team and policy-makers might consider in the development of future programmes:

- Authorities to continue to work closely with their care leaver groups to identify strategies for reaching more young people; increasing diversity of the groups and ensuring that contingency plans are in place regarding sustainability, when young people leave and move on from the forums.
- Formal arrangements between the care leaver forum and corporate parenting structures are in place.

- Sufficient time is allocated to canvassing young people's views via the survey. There is an overhaul of the method for distribution and more flexible and creative ways to gain young people's views are used.
- Support with analysis and management of survey data is made available.
- Ways to facilitate partnership working and opportunities to share practice and learning continue to be developed. Such opportunities are supported including the maintenance and spread of cluster working.
- Consideration is given to expanding networking and shared learning opportunities to include Personal Advisers and care leaver forums.
- Effective systems are put in place for sharing resources and ideas across all LAs taking part, to promote learning during the life of the programme. For example, a 'virtual enquiry' system could be put in place so that peer support is not principally via the clusters.
- Strategies to engaging the wider community (local people, businesses and community groups) should be prioritised in any future New Belongings programme.
- Completion of the self-assessment tool becomes part of the core method of New Belongings and a requirement of participation in the programme.
- The areas identified in the self-assessment and care leaver survey as requiring particular attention should be a key priority for the forthing coming Government Care leaver strategy, in particular preparation for independence, addressing isolation and loneliness and ensuring there is responsive health and wellbeing support.
- Adequate timescales and resources are required to enable approaches to become embedded and have an impact within large and complex environments such as local authorities.

7. References

Access all Areas Report (2012) https://secure.toolkitfiles.co.uk/clients/23786/sitedata/files/Access_All_Areas_Complete.pdf (Accessed 23/06/2016)

Biehal, N., Clayden, J., Stein, M., and Wade, J. (1995) Moving On: young people and leaving care schemes, HMSO, London.

Broad, B. (2005) *Improving the Health and Well Being of Young People Leaving Care*. RHP,Dorset

Care Leavers Charter (2014)

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/264694/Care_leavers__charter.pdf (Accessed 23/06/2016).

Centrepoint (2010), *The changing face of youth homelessness*, London: Centrepoint

C*risis. (2011) The hidden truth about homelessness,* London: Crisis,

Department for Education (2014), Children and Families Act, London

Department for Education, (2013) NEET Statistics – *NEET statistics: quarterly brief* – quarter 2, 2012

DfE (2010),The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations. Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers, London

DfE (2015) Children looked after in England including adoption: 2014 to 2015 National Statistics. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2014-to-2015 (Accessed: 23 June 2016)

Dixon, J. (2008) Young people leaving care: health, well-being and outcomes, Child and Family Social Work, 13, 2, 207-217

Dixon, J. and Stein, M. (2005) Leaving Care: Throughcare and aftercare in Scotland, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London.

Dixon, J., Lee, J. with Stein, M., Guhirwa, H., Bowley, S. and Catch 22 Peer Researchers (2015) Corporate Parenting for Young People in Care: Making the difference?, Catch22, London.

Dixon, J., Wade, J., Byford, S., Weatherly, H., and Lee, J. (2006) Young People Leaving Care: A Study of Costs and Outcomes: Final Report to the Department for Education & Skills, Social Work Research and Development Unit, University of York, York.

Franks, R.P. and Schroeder, J. (2013) Implementation Science What Do We Know and Where Do We Go from Here? In Halle, T., Martinez-Beck, I. and Metz, A. (eds) Applying Implementation Science in Early Childhood Programs and Systems Brookes Publishing | www.brookespublishing.com | 1-800-638-3775

Hannon, C., Wood, C. and Bazalgette, L, (2010) In loco Parentis, Demos.

HM Government (2013), Care Leaver Strategy: A cross-departmental strategy for young people leaving care, London

Lindsay, M. and Stein, M. (2014) New Belongings: A Better Deal for Care Leavers, An Independent Evaluation of the New Belongings Project, The Care Leavers' Foundation.

Meltzer, H. (2003) *The Mental Health of Young People Looked after by Local Authorities in England*. HMSO, London.

MoJ (2012), *Prisoners' childhood and family backgrounds Results from surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) longitudinal cohort study of prisoners*, London: Ministry of Justice, 2012

Munro R,E, Lushey C, National Care Advisory Service, Maskell-Graham, D. and Ward H with Holmes L (2011), Evaluation of the Staying Put: 18+ Family Placement Programme Pilot: Final Report, DfE

New Belongings (2016 Forthcoming) A Guide To The New Belongings Approach And Methodology: Improving Services To Care Leavers, The Care Leavers' Foundation.

OFSTED (2016) https://www.gov.uk/find-ofsted-inspection-report (Accessed: 23 June 2016)

Stein, M. (2012) Young People Leaving Care: Supporting pathways to adulthood, Jessica Kingsley, London.

Wade, J. and Dixon, J.,(2006) Making a home, finding a job: investigating early housing and employment outcomes for young people leaving care, *Child and Family Social Work*, 11, 3, 199-208

Appendix 1 Evaluation methodology

Document review and analysis

A range of programme documents were requested and received from the New Belongings team, these included the original bids made by the local authority when applying to take part, work plans and final review paperwork produced by LAs (n=23, 82%).

Secondary analysis of care leaver survey data

We received survey responses from 23 out of 28 LAs (82%) from local authorities this constituted nearly 800 care leaver views. The survey data was in various formats such as 'raw data'; copies of paper survey; summary reports and presentations of findings. A thematic analysis of the data was undertaken to help the understand care leavers experiences in the authorities as well as the issues they identify as important.

Self-assessment tool

A self-assessment tool was created for both existing NB authorities and potential future participants to enable them to assess and benchmark their service. All 28 authorities were invited to complete the tool towards the start of the programme.

Self-Assessment Response Rates

Time point	Sent out	Returned	Response Rate %
Baseline	28	19	68%
Follow-up	19	10	53%

Telephone interviews with local authority staff

Telephone (or on occasion face to face) interviews were conducted to examine progress and impact; n=18 were undertaken representing a response rate of 64%. These were undertaken at the end of the project (April 2016).

Focus groups with New Belongings personnel

In the final quarter of the project (January to March 2016) two focus groups were held with members from the New Belongings team. One was conducted with all eight of the New Belongings facilitators and one with the care leaver panellists (sixteen in attendance).

Case study areas

Five local authorities were selected as case study areas for a more detailed exploration of how the leaving care services were viewed and the impact of the NB programme in the local area. Case study areas were chosen to represent examples of promising practice, as identified in their self-assessment returns, their care leaver surveys and by recommendations from the NB facilitators. The case study areas were also drawn from different NB clusters to reflect the geographic spread of the programme.

Case study data collection involved collating the existing data from the self-assessment tool, the care leaver survey and interviews with the local authority lead for New Belongings to provide an overview of the local authority and its services for care leavers. To broaden the range of perspectives and mirror the aims of NB (i.e. to increase young people's participation and raise awareness of and involvement in leaving care support amongst of the wider community), additional data collection activities were introduced for the case study areas:

- Focus group discussions were conducted with the local care leaver forums (or similar) to gather young people's views on participation, priority areas for service development, and involvement with NB.
- In addition, an online survey was created for key stakeholders on local corporate parenting boards.

Focus groups with young people

Focus groups were held in the in-depth areas at the end of Phase 2 of NB between March and May 2015. The aim was to understand how New Belongings has supported the young people's aspirations and capacity as change agents. Originally we aimed for our focus groups to have up to five care leavers in, in reality numbers were slightly lower than this.

	Number of young people
Case Study Area 1	3
Case Study Area 2	4
Case Study Area 3	4
Case Study Area 4	4
Case Study Area 5	3
Total	18

Online survey to corporate parenting partners

A short (nine questions) online survey was sent to corporate parenting partners in three of the five in-depth sites after Phase 2 of New Belongings had completed (April to May 2014). The response rates for the corporate parenting (CP) survey were very low, with only three of the five case study areas distributing the survey to relevant partner services and departments. Equally, the response rates within the three local authorities was low (n=11) with the majority of completed surveys coming from one local authority.

Appendix 2 The Baker & Dixon Leaving Care Services Self-Assessment Framework

What is the framework?

- The **Leaving Care Services Self-Assessment Framework** tool was created by Dr. Claire Baker and Jo Dixon. The tool was developed and tested as part of their work leading the independent evaluation of the New Belongings programme . It is based on the New Belongings 10 'gold standard' areas, [9] which reflect young people's pathways to adulthood (Stein, 2012[10]).
- In each of the 10 areas, there are a number of statements relating to what might be expected in a 'gold standard' service to care leavers.
- The tool offers local authorities the opportunity to assess their current performance in the 10 areas and to ask: 'W*hat are my local authority's current strengths and what are the areas that need development*?'
- This is a new tool created by Baker & Dixon. It draws upon existing evidence and recognised frameworks for supporting care leavers (e.g. Care Planning and Transitions guidance; Ofsted framework; audit tools and a range of research and practice evidence[11].

How can this framework help your service?

- Local authorities are free to use this tool and to honestly appraise their current performance in 10 key areas, providing supporting evidence where appropriate and available.
- The tool will help your local authority to identify key priorities and actions.
- Completing this self-assessment framework will be a useful exercise to conduct in preparation for Ofsted inspection or supporting your post Ofsted action plans.

Rating your service using the self-assessment framework

---

[9] Services responsive to views of care leavers (as individuals and a group); Being informed and supported; Educated (to their potential); Helped into work (employability); Having good health and wellbeing; Being in safe and settled accommodation; Having an adequate level of income; Having people to count on for emotional support; Being able to manage day to day life; Services that are used by more vulnerable care leavers such as disabled care leavers, young people who have been homeless, in the youth justice system, living out of area , UASC.

[10] Stein, M. (2012) Young People Leaving Care: Supporting pathways to adulthood, Jessica Kingsley, London.

[11] Selected list of key resources used to inform the development of the leaving care self-assessment framework: Barnardos questions for Corporate parents; Barnardos Beyond Care; LGA questions to ask for scrutinising services; analysis of over 20 Ofsted reports; Barnardos Costs of not Caring; New Belongings year 1 documents; Centre for Social Justice – Finding their feet; Office for Children Commissioner – 10 points for CiCC to monitor; LILAC work; North West minimum standards; DfE residential care quality standards; NICE LAC health work; NCB – putting corporate parenting into practice; DfE Care leaver data pack; IRISS – redesigning support for Care leavers; Access All Areas; Care leaver Charter; Care Inquiry etc.

We have tested out a range of rating scales with experts in the social care field and there was little consensus as to a preferred scale. We have therefore opted for a scale that indicates the extent to which you agree that your service has in place the relevant approaches and provision listed across the 10 gold standard areas.

Agreement is based on your confidence that there is evidence to support your response. We know that it is often difficult to narrow down aspects of a service to a single response, therefore please use the following guide:

1. **Agree -** you are confident that there is strong evidence that this is in place in the leaving care service/ local authority at present**.**
2. **Mostly agree -** though not fully in place, there is evidence that this is happening in the leaving care service /local authority at present.
3. **Mostly disagree -** on balance there is insufficient / limited good evidence to show that this is happening in the leaving care service/local authority at present.
4. **Disagree -** all things considered, there is little or no evidence that this is happening in the leaving care service/local authority at present.

How do you use this framework?
There are a number of ways to complete the framework:

1. **Discussion group** - Local authorities may wish to consider completing the framework during a meeting using a co-production model (i.e. involving a range of key stakeholders including care leavers, working together on an equal footing, to identify and develop solutions). Working in this way will generate debate, discussion, challenge, examples, ideas and solutions. It could also promote 'ownership' and commitment to the work across the authority.
    -
2. **Lead person** – The tool can be filled in by the leaving care local authority lead (or other) drawing on their knowledge across the authority, (they could consider delegating sections to colleagues).

The areas covered in the framework aim to be comprehensive but inevitably some areas will have been missed so do make use of the comment sections. *Please use the tool in the most useful way for your local authority*. The comment boxes will expand, so please provided as much information as you would like. You do not have to fill in information in every comment box.

Follow up Self-Assessment
As part of the New Belongings evaluation the authorities who had completed the initial self-assessment were asked to complete a review of their services (six months later). This tool is included for information.

Name of Local authority: **Date of completion of self-assessment:**

Name:	Date:

Email details of lead person completing the assessment: **Job title lead person:**

How was the self-assessment completed? (E.g. by individual only; working group; by number of people etc.)

1. Services responsive to the views of care leavers (as individuals and a group).

Gold Standard Area 1	***Thinking about how your leaving care service is operating <u>at present</u>, please indicate how far you agree with the following statements:*** **please tick ✓**	**Agree at present**	**Mostly agree**	**Mostly disagree**	**Disagree at present**	**Feel free to include evidence (e.g. comments, actions or links to supporting information). This might help you when reflecting back on your assessment.**
Services responsive to views of care leavers	a. There is clear commitment from strategic leaders to improving leaving care services.					
	b. Care leavers are pivotal in shaping services and influencing how support is delivered.					
	c. We have various mechanisms for seeking feedback from care leavers about the support they receive.					
	d. There are opportunities for elected members to meet, listen to and work alongside care leavers.					
	e. Our children in care council (or similar) has strong care leaver representation and we have examples of the impact they have made.					
	f. Our local authority has ways to celebrate care leavers' achievements.					
	g. Where complaints have identified deficiencies or gaps in services this has led to positive changes in delivery of service.					
	h. Care leavers are involved in the recruitment, selection and training of staff and carers.					
	i. We have robust management information, which meets Annex A. (Ofsted) and SSDA903 return requirements and allows managers to track individual young people and also identify collective needs and concerns.					
Overall Rating	We would rate our current performance in ensuring services are *responsive to views of care leavers* as: **/ 10** [score out of 10]					

2. Being informed and supported.

Gold Standard Area 2	*Thinking about how your leaving care service is operating at present, please indicate how far you agree with the following statements:* **please tick ✓**	Agree at present	Mostly agree	Mostly disagree	Disagree at present	Feel free to include evidence (e.g. comments, actions or links to supporting information)
Being informed and supported	a. We have information (in a range of formats for all ages/levels of ability) explaining what it means to be a care leaver available to young people, staff and carers.					
	b. Care leavers are aware of the Care Leavers Charter (and/or local pledge) and involved in the design, updating and scrutiny of it.					
	c. Care leavers have opportunities to get support from, and give support to, other care leavers.					
	d. Processes and support are in place for those care leavers who wish to access their files.					
	e. Care leavers have clear information on how to make a complaint.					
	f. We have developed a range of social media platforms to engage and inform care leavers.					
	g. We support care leavers to build networks so that they do not feel alone and experience loneliness.					
	h. Care leavers are given and take up opportunities for volunteering in the local authority and community.					
	i. We have a high quality advocacy service accessible to all care leavers.					
	j. All of our care leavers are provided with all the key documents they need to begin their lives as young adults, e.g. national insurance numbers, birth certificates and passports.					
	k. We help care leavers understand the reasons why they were in care.					
	l. Care leavers report that they are happy with the information they receive about services and know their entitlements.					
Overall Rating	We would rate our current performance in ensuring care leavers are *informed and supported* as: **/ 10** [score out of 10]					

3. Educated (to their potential).

Gold Standard Area 3	***Thinking about how your leaving care service is operating at present, please indicate how far you agree with the following statements:*** **please tick ✓**	**Agree at present**	**Mostly agree**	**Mostly disagree**	**Disagree at present**	**Feel free to include evidence (e.g. comments, actions or links to supporting information)**
Educated (to their potential)	a. All care leavers are encouraged, supported and funded to achieve their potential in education.					
	b. Evidence shows that the local authority education performance data for care leavers improves year on year.					
	c. Our virtual school head takes responsibility for maximising the learning opportunities for all care leavers up to 25.					
	d. We are confident that all of our care leavers understand the support (including financial) available to them in regards to help with education.					
	e. We have protocols with local FE Colleges and Universities and have named lead contacts.					
	f. All care leavers, staff and carers are given clear information about how to request support if they wish to return for support with education or training after age 21 [PA to 25 duties].					
	g. We have a clear financial policy outlining the support we offer care leavers attending FE and HE.					
	h. Education professionals contribute to the Pathway Planning process (assessment, review and actions).					
	i. Feedback from care leavers shows they are satisfied with the support for education that they receive.					
Overall Rating	We would rate our current performance in ensuring care leavers are *educated to their potential* as: **/ 10** [score out of 10]					

4. Helped into work (employability).

Gold Standard Area 4	***Thinking about how your leaving care service is operating at present, please indicate how far you agree with the following statements:*** **please tick ✓**	**Agree at present**	**Mostly agree**	**Mostly disagree**	**Disagree at present**	**Feel free to include evidence (e.g. comments, actions or links to supporting information)**
Helped into work (employability)	a. Our local authority provides care leavers with in-house opportunities for work experience, training and employment as well as finding opportunities with partner agencies and local employers.					
	b. There are clear processes in place to ensure all care leavers receive career planning and support.					
	c. Employability professionals contribute to the Pathway Planning process (assessment, review and actions).					
	d. We track and monitor the needs of our care leaver cohort and actively seek out opportunities to match the needs and aspirations of the group.					
	e. We have approaches and services to support young people who are less academically able or lacking in motivation.					
	f. Care leavers, staff and carers understand the support (including financial) available to them in regards to help with employment.					
	g. We have effective local partnership arrangements with Job Centre Plus colleagues.					
	h. Feedback from care leavers shows they are satisfied with the support for help into work that they receive.					
Overall Rating	We would rate our current performance in *helping care leavers into work* as: **/ 10** [score out of 10]					

5. Having good health and wellbeing.

Gold Standard Area 5	*Thinking about how your leaving care service is operating at present, please indicate how far you agree with the following statements: :* **please tick ✓**	Agree at present	Mostly agree	Mostly disagree	Disagree at present	Feel free to include evidence (e.g. comments, actions or links to supporting information)
Having good health and wellbeing	a. Support is given to care leavers about promoting healthy lifestyles and to take part in healthy activities.					
	b. Effective partnership agreements and protocols have been established between health services and our local authority.					
	c. Care leavers have access to services to help with substance misuse, sexual health and teenage pregnancy.					
	d. Links are established with CAMHS and community mental health services to ensure care leavers are given priority access to targeted services.					
	e. Health professionals contribute to the Pathway Planning process (assessment, review and actions).					
	f. Care leavers have access to, and understand, their full health history.					
	g. We have robust systems in place to help care leavers to recover and heal from past harm and to promote resilience and emotional wellbeing.					
	h. Care leavers have access to a designated nurse (or equivalent).					
	i. Joint protocols are in place to provide support for those care leavers transferring to adult services.					
	j. Feedback from care leavers shows that they are satisfied with the support they receive to meet their health and wellbeing needs.					
Overall Rating	We would rate our current performance in ensuring care leavers are *supported with their health* and wellbeing as: **/ 10** [score out of 10]					

6. Being in safe and settled accommodation.

Gold Standard Area 6	*Thinking about how your leaving care service is operating at present, please indicate how far you agree with the following statements:* **please tick ✓**	Agree at present	Mostly agree	Mostly disagree	Disagree at present	Feel free to include evidence (e.g. comments, actions or links to supporting information)
Being in safe and settled accommodation	a. Care leavers tell us they have enough information about where they will be living, the options available to them and how they will get help in the future.					
	b. Structures and processes are in place to ensure that all accommodation offered to care leavers is safe and suitable including risk assessments conducted on unregulated accommodation.					
	c. We offer a range of accommodation to our care leavers matched to the needs of our care leaver population.					
	d. All relevant services and stakeholders (including young people) have contributed to a detailed accommodation needs analysis.					
	e. Our housing allocation policy prioritises care leavers					
	f. Joint protocols and agreements are in place between children's services and housing partners.					
	g. We never use B&B accommodation.					
	h. Strategies to identify and address risks of tenancy breakdown are in place.					
	i. Accommodation is financially sustainable for young people.					
	j. Housing professionals contribute to the Pathway Planning process (assessment, review and actions).					
	k. Our Staying Put policy is working well and embedded across our authority.					
	l. Staying Put in residential care is available in our authority.					
	m. Services work together to avoid care leavers becoming 'intentionally' homeless.					
Overall Rating	We would rate our current performance in ensuring care leavers are *living in safe and settled accommodation* as: **/ 10** [score out of 10]					

7. Having an adequate level of income.

Gold Standard Area 7	*Thinking about how your leaving care service is operating at present, please indicate how far you agree with the following statements:* please tick ✓	Agree at present	Mostly agree	Mostly disagree	Disagree at present	Feel free to include evidence (e.g. comments, actions or links to supporting information)
Having an adequate level of income	a. Our local authority has in place clear written policies and procedures on the financial assistance available to care leavers.					
	b. Care leavers pathway assessments and plans include a comprehensive assessment of financial needs and how these needs will be met.					
	c. Care leavers, staff and carers are aware of the financial support policies.					
	d. Care leavers receive a 'setting up home' allowance that is sufficient to ensure they have all the essentials they need.					
	e. Care leavers have choice and flexibility in how and when they receive & spend their setting up home allowance.					
	f. We open savings accounts for children in care and encourage use of these as the child grows.					
	g. Young people and staff have access to expert advice to help maximise income and financial support.					
	h. Young people leaving care receive support to manage their money (e.g. to develop their budgeting and financial management skills).					
	i. Financial assistance is provided to young people when they are in a crisis.					
	j. Generally, care leavers say they are happy with the support they receive with managing their finances.					
Overall Rating	We would rate our current performance in ensuring care leavers *have an adequate level of income* as: **/ 10** [score out of 10]					

8. Having people to count on for emotional support.

Gold Standard Area 8	*Thinking about how your leaving care service is operating at present, please indicate how far you agree with the following statements:* **please tick ✓**	Agree at present	Mostly agree	Mostly disagree	Disagree at present	Where applicable please feel free to add comments, actions or provide links to supporting information
Having people to count on for emotional support	a. Care leavers are supported to maintain relationships that are significant to them (e.g. with birth parents, siblings, former carers).					
	b. All care leavers have a named allocated worker					
	c. We have good support in place for care leavers who return home.					
	d. Our local authority is more than the resources we provide, we are a source of social and emotional support for care leavers.					
	e. We visit care leavers regularly and when they ask.					
	f. We value the expertise of older care leavers who may act as 'peer supporters'/role models.					
	g. Elected members, staff and carers are trained and supported to carry out their roles as corporate parents.					
	h. Care leavers report that they find it easy to get in touch with their worker or others who know them.					
	i. Our local authority is proactive in keeping in touch with all care leavers and we have a very low proportion with whom we are not in touch.					
	j. Our leaving care service operates from a venue that encourages care leavers to drop in and attend activities.					
	k. We monitor worker 'case loads' to ensure staff have capacity to develop meaningful relationships.					
	l. Young people have someone to call 'out of hours'.					
	m. Care leavers tell us that they trust our staff and feel they care for them and know them well.					
Overall Rating	We would rate our current performance in ensuring care leavers are *have people available for emotional support* as: **/ 10** [score out of 10]					

9. Being able to manage day to day life.

Gold Standard Area 9	*Thinking about how your leaving care service is operating at present, please indicate how far you agree with the following statements:* **please tick** ✓	Agree at present	Mostly agree	Mostly disagree	Disagree at present	Where applicable please feel free to add comments, actions or provide links to supporting information
Being able to manage day to day life	a. Young people are supported to develop the skills and confidence they need to maximise their chances of successful maturity to adulthood whilst in foster care, children's homes' or supported accommodation.					
	b. We are confident that by the time they leave care, our care leavers are well prepared in a way that reflects their needs.					
	c. Training flats (or equivalent) are available to provide a supportive environment to 'test out' independence and skills.					
	d. Our preparation support is designed and run either by, or with, young people who have experience of leaving care.					
	e. Young people have a Pathway Plan that complies with regulations and guidance and that is regularly reviewed and quality assured.					
	f. Generally young people report that they find pathway planning helpful in supporting them day to day.					
	g. Young people can return to a more supported environment if they wish.					
Overall Rating	We would rate our current performance in ensuring care leavers are *able to manage day to day life* as: **/ 10** [score out of 10]					

10. Services that are used by more vulnerable care leavers (for example: disabled care leavers; young people who have been homeless; in the youth justice system; living out of area; UASC).

Gold Standard Area 10	*Thinking about how your leaving care service is operating at present, please indicate how far you agree with the following statements:* **please tick** ✓	Agree at present	Mostly agree	Mostly disagree	Disagree at present	Where applicable please feel free to add comments, actions or provide links to supporting information
Services more responsive to vulnerable groups	a. Every care leaver receives a service that values diversity, promotes fairness and challenges discrimination.					
	b. We work with young people to actively mitigate discrimination and dispel myths about being in care.					
	c. We have strategies in place to ensure that we offer the same level of support to care leavers living out of authority.					
	d. We have policies and procedures which specifically address the particular needs of 'vulnerable groups'.					
	e. Our staff receives appropriate training and support to recognise and engage with care leavers with complex needs.					
	f. We have information on the number and experiences of care leavers who run away, go missing or are at risk of sexual exploitation.					
	g. We undertake multi-agency risk assessment on all care leavers, involving all agencies where necessary and have arrangements to escalate concerns to senior managers and DCS					
Overall Rating	We would rate our current performance in ensuring *vulnerable groups are supported* as: **/ 10** [score out of 10]					

Baker & Dixon Follow up Self-Assessment Framework for Leaving Care Services.

Those local authorities taking part in the New Belongings evaluation that had completed the initial self-assessment were asked to complete a short review of their current position in relation to the 10 'gold standard' areas, approximately six months after the initial assessment.

Gold standard area:	**Stage 1 Score** (Score out of 10) *Fill in original score*	**Stage 2 Score Score out of 10**	**Comments** - What helped - Barriers - Next steps
1. Responsive to views of care leavers (feedback from CL; elected members; CiCC inc. CI; achievements; complaints processes)			
2. Care leavers are Informed & supported (aware Charter; info for CL; access files; social media; volunteering; advocacy)			
3. Educated (to potential) (CL data improving; VSH up to 25; info on PA to 25; protocols with FE/HE)			
4. Employability (helped into work) (CL opps re: work exp, apprenticeships; career planning; JCP links)			
5. Having good health & wellbeing (promoting healthy lifestyles; access to health services; CAMHS links; access designated nurse; joint protocols with adult services)			
6. Safe & settled accommodation (risk assess on accomm; range available; housing allocation policy prioritise CL; SP working well)			
7. Adequate level of income (clear policies on finance; staff aware of policies; saving account; advice)			
8. People to count on emotional support (support to maintain relationships; support for CL return home; peer support; train corporate parent; out of hours)			
9. Manage day to day life (YP develop skills need; training flats; prep support involves YP)			
10. Responsive to more vulnerable CL (support to out of area CL; policies on vulnerable YP; info on missing/CSE; risk assessments)			
Total score	/100	/100	

Department for Education

© Jo Dixon and Claire Baker

Reference: DFE-RR616

ISBN: 978-1-78105-676-9

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at:
Ross.Campbell@education.gov.uk or www.education.gov.uk/contactus

This document is available for download at www.gov.uk/government/publications