Throughcare and Aftercare Services in Scotland's Local Authorities
A National Study

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Improving care experiences

Foreword

For most young people today, moving in to their own accommodation, entering further or higher education or training, finding satisfying employment and achieving good health and a positive sense of well-being, represent important landmarks during their journey to adulthood. It is usually a time of optimism, expectation and excitement as well as apprehension and uncertainty.

Research studies from the 1980's have shown that young people leaving care may face more difficulties than other young people in achieving these landmarks. Their journey may be shorter, more severe and often more hazardous than for those young people leaving their family home. And they may have been burdened by earlier negative experiences of poor parenting, including maltreatment and social disadvantage. In addition, for some young people, the poor quality of care they have experienced may have failed to compensate them for past difficulties.

In Scotland it is the responsibility of local authorities, as corporate parents, to ensure that all their young people living in care fulfil their potential on their journey to adulthood. This is recognised in recent policy developments introduced by the Scottish Government, including new opportunities for young people to remain in placements where they are settled – 'staying put' – new housing protocols and the extension of assistance and support for young people up to 26 years of age.

The research findings contained within this report show that local authorities still face many important challenges in providing quality throughcare and aftercare services. These include: how best to engage, plan for and support young people into adulthood; how to meet the needs of different groups of care leavers; how to ensure they have the information they need to plan services and monitor young people's outcomes and; how leaving care services can best be organised to meet the needs of young people in both preparing them and supporting them after they leave care.

It is also recognised within this report that in response to the wide range of needs of young people - for help with preparation and assistance with education and careers, accommodation, health and well being - *corporate parenting* is essential to their successful transitions. There is strong evidence that good corporate parenting requires commitment at four levels: *political and governmental* – elected members and civil servants; *strategic* – those responsible for directing and commissioning services; *operational* – senior managers and heads of services; and *practice* – frontline staff and practitioners.

A comprehensive approach to improving the quality of throughcare and aftercare services will require action at all four levels, as well as consistency between them. In this context, it is very pertinent that the findings of this research are seen as the beginning of a process of reflection and discussion, to explore the implications for developing services and improving the life chances of young people from care to adulthood. Being a good corporate parent is not cheap but the longer term costs associated with poor parenting and outcomes – both for the young person and society – are far greater.

Professor Mike Stein, Social Policy Research Unit, University of York

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However, if any research study is to have real positive impact, the production of a report cannot be the end; the findings must be shared and used effectively. We therefore thank in advance all those who will help to disseminate this information and those partners who will use these findings to help shape policy, practice and ultimately, young people's experiences.

Thank you.

Young people's participation should be at the heart of the leaving care legislation. We need to make processes meaningful and straightforward. We need to follow young peoples' plans and support them when they make mistakes, we need to advocate on their behalf, we need to campaign for better resources, we need to challenge our colleagues to ensure they get the service they deserve, we need to challenge stereotypes, we need to believe in the young people.
(Survey participant)

Executive summary

This research seeks to establish a clear picture of current throughcare and aftercare (TCAC) provision across Scotland's local authorities and to provide evidence that will inform ongoing debates about future directions and priorities for the TCAC sector. Above all, the research seeks to provide an evidence base which will help ensure that all care leavers receive the support they need to make a successful and positive transition into adult life.

Each care leaver is unique; each has a different trajectory and different options, opportunities and choices. Some may do very well in life, but taken as a group, care leavers have some of the poorest outcomes in society; they experience:

- much higher rates of early death;
- poorer access to continuing education or training;
- greater unemployment and homelessness;
- worse mental health and physical wellbeing;
- greater rates of teenage pregnancy; and
- an increased likelihood of involvement in or exposure to, criminal activity.

(Dixon, 2008; Dixon & Stein, 2005; Rainer, 2007; Stein, 2004; Stein & Carey, 1986; Stein & Munro, 2008)

Stakeholders across the whole sector increasingly recognise that care leavers need greater support, over a longer period of time, in order to significantly improve their outcomes. The intention to deliver this support has been indicated by the responsibilities outlined in the newly passed Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill. This Bill extends the age to which care leavers are able to receive support up to and including age 25 years. However, the prevailing financial climate presents decision makers and service providers with very real challenges, in the face of competing demands, in maintaining, improving and extending throughcare and aftercare services.

In this report the term 'TCAC services' will be used to describe all forms of TCAC provision including provision offered through specialist TCAC teams, generic departments and integrated teams.

Research Aims and Methods

The research explored the nature and extent of throughcare and aftercare provision in local authorities across Scotland. Particular attention was paid to the following areas:

- Population characteristics of care leavers who engage with TCAC services
- Views of the impact of TCAC services on outcomes for care leavers
- Contemporary developments and challenges in the TCAC sector
- Issues related to data collection about and monitoring of care leavers
- Extent and type of change that TCAC services may face in the future.

The research comprised a mixed methods approach involving two key approaches. First, a survey of local authorities gathered detailed data about care leaver demographics, services offered and service structure. Second, representatives from 11 local authorities participated in follow-up interviews to gather information in greater depth and detail. In total, 27 Scottish local authorities took part (from a possible total of 32).

Numeric data from the survey were entered into SPSS and various descriptive analyses conducted. Open response data from the survey along with data from interviews were analysed using qualitative techniques, including thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). Five researchers (academic and practitioner) from the team read the data and helped to identify themes. After discussion, the data were coded by two researchers using QSR NVivo.

Findings

The complete findings from the study exceed what it is possible to report in this document; therefore we plan to publish further topical briefings on aspects such as *Role and Identity of TCAC Services*, *Engagement and Service User Participation* and *Partnership Working* at a later date. In this report the following areas are explored:

- Who receives a service; eligibility and engagement
- Service content and structure
- Approaches to corporate parenting
- Recording and use of data
- Challenges and opportunities for the sector.

Who receives a service; eligibility and engagement

Findings highlight a variety of approaches to how local authorities target and engage care leavers. Some local authorities offer support to all eligible young people, whether they have been looked after at home or away from home. Other local authorities prioritise young people placed in residential care, foster care or external placements and do not offer services to young people looked after at home, regardless of need or vulnerability. There are, therefore, significant numbers of eligible young people who do not currently receive a service. This is primarily attributed to resource and capacity

issues, such that services are allocated according to local interpretations of duty and legislative thresholds.

Similarly, local authorities adopt different approaches when describing what is meant by the 'engagement' of young people. In some areas young people can be counted (and reported) as being engaged when the authority sends a text message or when intermittent use is made of a duty-worker system whilst in other areas engagement is counted as being when the young person is in receipt of intensive or sustained support.

Limited levels of engagement were often explained in the context of a young person's right or choice not to engage with services; however, fluctuations in engagement were often said to be driven by crises in young people's lives. Consequently participants also frequently stated the necessity of providing consistent, proactive support in order to build and maintain relationships. These two positions are somewhat contradictory, but participants may feel they resolve this by taking an individually informed approach.

The issues above suggest fundamental variations of thinking and approach which would benefit from national level debate. Whilst the aim would not be to standardise delivery, a basic consensus around broad aims and approaches may help to ensure that eligible young people who need support receive it.

Service content and structure

TCAC services were offered through a range of service structures according to Stein's (2012) typologies (see Appendix 1). Over half (15 of 26) were delivered through a centralised service. There were low numbers of other service structures, for example, dual service delivery or dispersed specialist services.

Taken as a whole, statutory partners and commissioned services contributed to all forms of service delivery, including the most commonly delivered services: tenancy support, personal and emotional support, practical skills training, education, training and employment and accommodation. Delivery by the different providers varied across authority; however, this does suggest that there are opportunities for collaborative working to meet the support needs of care leavers.

Delivery and structure change was a recurring feature for TCAC teams; most teams have been greatly impacted upon by the wider restructuring and service redesign and around two-thirds of authorities (65%) anticipated further change to services in the near future. Change to service structure has resulted in many teams and groups of specialists being variously reorganised, amalgamated, de-centralised and disaggregated. We found limited evidence that changes were primarily formulated with the intention of improving outcomes for looked after young people and care leavers, although change initiated at TCAC service level was often reported to be positive, potentially resulting in improvements for care leavers.

With notable exceptions, local authorities seemed unable, hesitant or reluctant to increase TCAC capacity or specialist knowledge and skills. Some authorities seemed to be gradually reducing the size of TCAC teams and this is perhaps surprising given the potential implications of the forthcoming Children's and Young People (Scotland) Bill.

Approaches to corporate parenting

Participants in around two-thirds of authorities raised corporate parenting as an important and relevant factor. Whilst some felt corporate parenting was quite advanced in their area, others felt that TCAC teams had to adopt a championing role, repeatedly reminding partner agencies and organisations of their duties and the issues that care leavers face. Staff in corporate partner agencies, including children and families services, were often regarded as having limited understanding of care leaver issues and poor knowledge of care leavers' level of social and emotional development. At times participants were frustrated by their inability to influence or secure real change.

Where corporate parenting at strategic level was reported to be more successful this was attributed to leadership and senior managers. If key people 'got it' a strong corporate parenting culture could develop which was 'owned' from the top down. Finally, the importance of developing a shared understanding of the meanings of corporate parenting was highlighted, as was the fact that young people themselves were often unaware of this agenda.

Recording and use of data

A major issue and concern across the sector was the difficulty of accessing and collating accurate data. There was not consistent recording of what participants described as 'meaningful data'. Inconsistent systems and processes resulted in difficulties aggregating or comparing data and there was little evidence that young people's outcomes were systematically recorded.

There were robust views questioning the value and process of data returns to Scottish Government and a suggestion that the wrong questions were being asked at the wrong time. It was suggested that this information provided a snapshot which was not fully accurate or meaningful for practitioners and operational managers.

It was acknowledged that better quality data would help to inform service planning and service improvement as well as supporting measures to improve practice in terms of consistency of care planning and reviewing in relation to transitions.

Challenges and Opportunities

A number of difficult challenges were apparent across the TCAC sector. Participants were concerned about the viability of continuing to provide current levels of service under the prevailing financial constraints. Legislative changes such as welfare reform and extending provision to care leavers until their 26th birthday were expected to create additional stresses for the system, especially given the fact that existing resource was

insufficient to meet the needs of all care leavers who were currently eligible. In some authorities measures were in place to begin to address these challenges however it was apparent that, for many, this work was at an early planning stage.

Participants emphasised that many of these challenges could be viewed as opportunities, which, if supported and resourced appropriately, would allow local authorities to meet their responsibilities to care leavers and contribute to improved outcomes for vulnerable young people.

Conclusions

The research offers a detailed picture of TCAC provision across Scotland from the perspective of local authority TCAC leaders. In many instances these participants described positive practice which occurred in spite of difficulties in the cultures, systems and constraints within which staff operate.

This report highlights many areas where practice is strong as well as dimensions where provision is more problematic. In terms of TCAC services, we found that some authorities formally targeted services only to the groups that they felt they had the highest level of duty to serve. Despite this, there was some evidence that support was being provided flexibly, such that if a young person presented needs which were deemed to be sufficient they may receive a level of support. However, as many eligible young people were reported to be unaware of their entitlement, belonging to a group other than those which were actively targeted would generally mean that a service was not requested or received. This is troubling given that all groups of care leavers face many challenges and, as a group, experience poor outcomes across many domains.

As with any study, this research has strengths and limitations. Strengths include the very high response rate, the richness and detail of the data provided and the mixed method approach. Limitations include the fact that we were only able to explore these matters from the local authority TCAC leaders' perspective. Other voices such the wider corporate family (including housing, health and education services), third and independent sector providers and local and national legislators may provide additional information. Most critically, future research should identify the perspectives of the users and potential users of TCAC services; these young people and their families have a clear right to comment and be involved in how services are developed and delivered to them.

We believe that for research to have impact it must be interactive. It is important that the 'audience' is able to identify what is most useful and consider how this may be re-applied in the real world. To help stimulate this process, we have identified a number of 'points for reflection' and present these in Appendix 4. Furthermore, we encourage observations, comments and feedback on this study and invite any reader who wishes to do so, to use the contact details provided (see front cover).

Introduction

Within the broad context of an extremely difficult financial environment for both the Scottish Government and Scotland's local authorities, the challenges facing Scotland's most vulnerable people have in many ways never been greater. Care leavers, who have been looked after by local authorities, are amongst the most vulnerable.

There is, however, growing recognition that care leavers need greater support, over a longer period of time, in order to significantly improve their outcomes. The Scottish Government has recently addressed this issue in a number of ways, through the publication of Staying Put Scotland (2013c), Housing Options Protocol for Care Leavers (2013b) and through the newly passed Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill, that extends the age care leavers are able to receive assistance and support from local authorities up to and including age 25.

This new legislation and guidance, however, is set against a backdrop of broader budgetary and operational demands. Local authorities face very real challenges in maintaining, improving and extending provision across Scotland, in particular Throughcare and Aftercare (TCAC) Services for young people leaving care

This research seeks to establish a clear picture of current TCAC provision across Scotland's local authorities and provide evidence to inform ongoing debates about future directions and priorities for the TCAC sector. Above all, the research seeks to provide an evidence base which will help ensure that all care leavers receive the support they need to make a successful and positive transition into adulthood.

This report provides information across the breadth of the study. Further outputs will be produced which will drill down into further detail on specific aspects of interest. The authors would additionally welcome enquiries for clarification or additional information and will respond positively whenever possible.

Definitions

Care Leaver (Children (Scotland) Act 1995). A care leaver is a young person who was looked after by the local authority at or after the time when he or she ceased to be of school leaving age but who is now no longer looked after by the local authority. Currently local authorities have duties to provide TCAC support until care leavers reach 19 years of age and discretionary powers to provide services until care leavers reach 21. [Section 29, Children (Scotland) Act 1995].

This will change in April 2015 when Parts 8 (Aftercare) and 8A (Continuing care: looked after children) of the Children and Young People Bill come into force.

Care Leaver (Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill 2014). Under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill a care leaver is a young person who was either looked after at the age of 'at least sixteen' years, but who is now no longer looked after, or any

person formerly looked after by a local authority as 'the Scottish Ministers may specify by order'. Local authorities will retain a duty to provide support to care leavers until their 19th birthday. Care leavers aged 19 years and over will retain responsibility for seeking support from services, as stipulated in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. However, under the new Bill, local authorities will have a duty to provide support to meet the assessed needs of care leavers aged 19 to 25.

Care leavers who are in education and employment until their 26th birthday may also receive support as outlined in Section 30 of the Children (Scotland) Act; that is, until care leavers in education reach 26 (or finish their course if this is later) and care leavers who are in employment may be supported until the age of 26. The new legislation will also give local authorities powers to provide support to care leavers beyond the age of 26:

> *A local authority may (but is not required to) continue to provide advice, guidance and assistance to a person in pursuance of subsection (5A) after the person reaches the age of twenty-six. (Part 8, Children and Young People Bill)*

Throughcare and Aftercare (TCAC) Services. TCAC services are statutory services provided (although not exclusively delivered) by social work services to care leavers. The purpose of throughcare and aftercare is to help care leavers during the transition from care to adulthood.

In this report the term 'TCAC services' will be used to describe all forms of TCAC provision including provision offered through specialist TCAC teams, generic departments and integrated teams.

Context

In this section, we aim to provide an outline of what is already known about care leavers' use of throughcare services. This includes brief references to important earlier research and various sources of administrative data currently in the public domain. We begin by considering some of the characteristics of leaving care.

Care leavers and their services

Whilst clear evidence about care leaver outcomes is difficult to obtain, where it is available, research has consistently shown that young people leaving care have been highly disadvantaged in comparison to their peers (Dixon, 2008; Rainer, 2007; Stein, 2004; Stein & Carey, 1986; Stein & Munro, 2008). Many of these differences seem to persist, regardless of the length of time since actually leaving care and disadvantage may be life-long for some young people.

Each care leaver is unique; each has a different trajectory and different options, opportunities and choices. Some may do very well in life. But taken as a group, care leavers have some of the poorest outcomes in society; they experience:

- much higher rates of early death;
- poorer access to continuing education or training;
- greater unemployment and homelessness;
- worse mental health and physical wellbeing;
- greater rates of teenage pregnancy; and
- an increased likelihood of involvement in or exposure to, criminal activity.

What's more, despite the fact that many of these young people have experienced traumatic and disrupted lives where they have had few opportunities to develop resilience and life skills, care leavers are expected to make earlier transitions to adulthood, seemingly with less support than young people in the general population (Jackson & Cameron, 2012; Stein, 2012). Undoubtedly, many care leavers undergo these transitions before they are ready (SCCYP, 2008) and find this a daunting, lonely and incredibly difficult experience (IRISS, 2012; Rogers, 2011; Stein, 2011).

Research carried out by Dixon and Stein (2002, 2005) highlighted that there was a need to reduce the number of post-care placement moves, assist with relationship difficulties, improve care planning, provide support for those in crisis and those facing homelessness and give personal support in relation to developing life skills.

Evidence from the Care Commission (now Care Inspectorate) suggests that services and support available to care leavers vary greatly in terms of availability, scope and quality and access to high quality services is patterned by location and a range of other factors. The Care Commission considered that over half of residential care homes failed to offer adequate support for young people leaving residential care and suggested that TCAC provision was patchy and variable across Scotland (Care Commission, 2009).

Dixon and Stein's survey of Scottish local authorities revealed that just over two-thirds of authorities had a specialist team or specialist staff with direct responsibility for TCAC services (Dixon & Stein, 2002, 2005). Just under two-thirds of these teams were centralised services with nearly three-quarters being managed by the local authority social care department. Whilst the centrally organised specialist team was the main model, just under one-third of local authorities had no specialist staff or team with direct responsibility for providing TCAC services.

The numbers of looked after children and care leavers

Scotland accommodates more children and young people per head of population than other UK countries (Department for Education, 2012; Scottish Government, 2013a; Welsh Government, 2013).

Scottish Government data demonstrates annual increases in the number of children and young people being looked after and at July 2012, 16, 248 children were looked after by Scottish local authorities (Scottish Government, 2013a).

Currently the upward trend in the absolute number of looked after children seems to be slowing; however, this may in part be due to population changes. The proportion of looked after children within the general population continues to climb slowly and is currently nearing 16 per 1,000 children aged 0-18 years (Scottish Government, 2013a).

The growth in the number of looked after children is not driven by an increase in the number of new children being looked after; this has fallen in recent years (Scottish Government, 2013a). Instead, the increasing number of looked after children results from two trends. Firstly, children are tending to become looked after at an earlier age; for example, the proportion of children who were aged under 12 was 53% in 2002; this rose to 70% in 2012 (Scottish Government, 2013a). Secondly, as shown in Table 1, children are tending to remain looked after for longer:

Table 1. Changes in proportions of children looked after for 1 year or more and 5 years or more

	Approximate proportions of all looked after children	
	2007 - 2008	2009 - 2012
Looked after for more than 1 year	60%	70%
Looked after for more than 5 years	9%	12%

There have also been changes in the prevalence of different placement types; for example, over the last ten or more years there have been marked increases in the numbers in kinship care, whilst numbers in residential care have continued to decline slowly and more children are now in foster care than on home supervision (Scottish Government, 2013a).

Scottish Government statistics suggest that since 2003 more than 1,200 young people over school leaving age leave care each year; the majority of these will be entitled to TCAC services (Scottish Government, 2013a).

On 31 July 2012, 3,870 young people were eligible for aftercare services; this was an increase of 6% since 2011. In 2011-2012, 2,542 (66%) of these young people were in receipt of some form of aftercare services (Scottish Government, 2013a). This is slightly lower than the proportion of care leavers in receipt of services during 2010-2011.

Currently the rate of those becoming eligible and those ceasing to be eligible for services is roughly equivalent such that the total number of care leavers in receipt of services remains relatively constant. However, proposals to extend support to care leavers up to the age of 25 will see a significant increase in the total number of young people eligible, although it is not known what the uptake of services by the 21 plus age group will be.

About this study

Aims and objectives of the study

This study aimed to explore the current nature of throughcare and aftercare service provision in Scotland, including existing and anticipated challenges for the sector. It is the first study since the work of Dixon and Stein to provide a national picture of TCAC provision in Scotland's local authorities.

Within this broad aim there were a number of objectives:

- To explore population characteristics of care leavers who engage with TCAC services
- To record the extent and nature of current TCAC provision in Scotland
- To explore views of how TCAC services may impact on the outcomes for care leavers
- To identify contemporary developments and challenges in the TCAC sector
- To examine issues about data collection and monitoring related to care leavers
- To consider the extent and type of change that TCAC services may face in the future.

Methods used

The research comprised a mixed methods approach involving two key methods. First, a survey of local authorities gathered detailed data about care leaver demographics, services offered and service structure. Second, a sample of 11 local authorities participated in follow-up interviews to gather information in greater depth and detail. These are described more fully below.

The research team comprised experienced TCAC managers and practitioners as well as academic researchers. This helped to ensure relevance and rigour. In addition, key stakeholders were involved in conceptualising and planning the study; this helped to facilitate the research process and will continue to be crucial to ensuring the study has impact.

Participants were keen to be involved in the study and tolerant of the demands made on their time. This level of cooperation helped to achieve a very good response-rate and 27 of the 32 local authorities in Scotland were involved in the study:

I appreciate this survey as it is long overdue. It aims to garner accurate information from those with the most knowledge and expertise and if responses are honest and truthful should allow policy makers to make informed decisions. (Survey participant)

We feel confident that the findings of this study will be used to inform discussion across the nation about future directions and priorities for the TCAC sector.

Method one: national survey of local authorities

A national survey of local authorities in Scotland was undertaken. TCAC Leads (or equivalent posts) in the 32 local authorities were invited to complete the questionnaire; 26 responded to this request.

Participants were asked to provide information and views about throughcare and aftercare in their local authority and to provide insights into the TCAC sector as a whole. Where time-bounded information was required, we requested that this should be provided for the period 1st August 2011 to 31st July 2012 in line with the reporting period for annual returns to Scottish Government. It was felt that this would reduce respondent burden.

The questionnaire contained six sections, covering key areas of service delivery and structure as well as opportunities for wider comment:

- Care Leaver Data
- TCAC Service Structure and Provision
- Staffing and Workloads
- Engaging with Care Leavers
- Assessment, Monitoring and Recording
- Working Practice, Challenges and Developments in the TCAC sector.

The content of each section is outlined below; a full copy of the survey instrument is available by contacting the authors.

Care Leaver Data. We requested aggregate data about the number and characteristics of care leavers using TCAC services (including factors such as age, gender, disability, and ethnicity) and projections of numbers of young people starting or ceasing to use TCAC services. These data were used to explore which care leavers are more or less likely to receive services.

TCAC Service Structure and Provision. Stein (2012) provides a typology of six TCAC service structures. Participants were asked to indicate which of these service structures most closely reflected their own service and to describe any recent or proposed changes to this service structure. To investigate service provision, participants were also asked to indicate whether a number of specified services were offered to care leavers and which type of service provider delivered these services.

Staffing and Workloads. Information was gathered about staffing and caseloads, including recent or proposed changes and the extent to which they felt that staffing matched service requirements.

Engaging with Care Leavers. Participants were asked to comment on levels of engagement with care leavers, including prioritisation of care leaver groups and opportunities to engage in service development.

Assessment, Monitoring and Recording. This section gathered information about the main types of assessment used with care leavers and the recording and measurement of care leaver outcomes.

Working Practice, Challenges and Developments in the TCAC sector. Participants were asked to provide information about what was working well and not so well in their service for care leavers. Further questions explored challenges and opportunities within the TCAC sector.

This was a lengthy questionnaire and whilst item response was generally good, some participants were unable to provide responses to all items. Where our findings are based on a limited number of responses this is made clear in the text.

During the course of the study we also confirmed that there are variations in recording formats across diverse TCAC services; this means that some results, particularly those describing differences between authorities, should be regarded as indicative. These findings remain useful; for, whilst the size of differences may ultimately prove to be somewhat more or less than these data would suggest, the existence of variation is an important factor.

Method two: follow-up interviews

The purpose of the follow-up interviews was to explore in greater depth a number of key themes arising from the survey. Survey results highlighted a number of areas which were of acute interest to local authorities and TCAC services. These areas generated more data and illustrated more variation in practice across local authorities than some of the other areas explored in the survey; they include:

- Statistics, Monitoring and Recording
- Service Structure
- Corporate Parenting
- Engagement with Young People
- Future Challenges.

TCAC Leads from a sample of 11 local authorities took part in follow-up interviews. Local authorities were selected with the aim of reflecting the diversity of geographical locations, population sizes and service structures across Scotland. One local authority unable to complete the survey in time for the deadline was keen to be included in the interviews; therefore the total number of local authorities involved in the study was 27.

Eight individual interviews were carried out in person or by phone, with most lasting around an hour; one group interview was held which lasted approximately two hours. Interviews were recorded with permission and transcribed for analysis.

Analysis and reporting across the study

Consistent with our mixed methods approach and broadly critical realist perspective, we adopted a pragmatic approach to data integration and analysis.

Numeric data from the survey were entered into SPSS and various descriptive analyses conducted. Open response data from the survey along with data from interviews were analysed using qualitative techniques, including thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). The analyses were conducted primarily at a semantic level, using both inductive and deductive approaches. Five researchers (academic and practitioner) from the team read the data and helped to identify themes. After discussion the data were coded by two researchers using QSR NVivo.

Further qualitative and quantitative analyses will be conducted for follow-on outputs focused on specific topics. Usual conventions are used for reporting statistical information.

Ethics

The research was granted ethical approval by the University of Strathclyde's School of Social Sciences Ethics Committee. Particular attention was paid to ensuring that participation was fully informed and consensual. Data from the study were stored and handled with great care and access was limited to researchers identified in the ethics application. Appropriate assurances were given about anonymity, both for participants and for organisations. Where identifiable practice examples have been given, additional consent was gained to do so.

Findings

Findings from the survey and interviews revealed that although participants share common concerns and perspectives on service provision, there is a high level of variation in practice and service delivery across authorities. Some of this variation may be driven by differences in local needs; however, much variation seems to be driven by the history and make up of local services.

The key areas discussed in this report are:

- Who receives a service; eligibility and engagement
- Service content and structure
- Approaches to corporate parenting
- Recording and use of data
- Challenges and opportunities for the sector.

It is not possible to cover in depth all areas in this report, therefore, topical briefings such as *Role and Identity of TCAC Services*, *Engagement and Service User Participation* and *Partnership Working*, will be published at a later date.

Who receives a service; eligibility and engagement

Local authorities differed in the extent to which care leaver groups were engaged with services. This section explores overall participation and then examines this by gender, age, equality groups, placement type and expected numbers of new care leavers and care leavers who will cease using services. This information refers to the period 1st August 2011 to July 31st 2012.

Care leavers in receipt of services

In total, 20 authorities, from whom data were available, reported that 2,958 care leavers were eligible for TCAC services. Of these care leavers, 1,976 (67%) engaged with services. This figure is similar to the nationally reported 66% for 2011-2012 (Scottish Government 2013) and suggests the survey response was nationally representative.

Across local authorities, however, levels of care leaver engagement varied considerably, ranging from 39% to 102% (see Table 1). Five authorities report that less than 50% of care leavers are engaged, whilst a further five authorities report that over 90% of care leavers are engaged with TCAC services.

Table 2. Proportions of care leavers engaged with services

Proportion	Authorities
90% and over	5
70 – 89%	4
50 – 69%	6
30 – 49%	5

When these issues were explored in follow-up interviews we found evidence to suggest that local authorities do not define or record data in the same way such that some of the apparent variations in engagement may be due to reporting differences. These differences involved both the numbers eligible and the numbers participating in services:

- Across authorities variation in definition of eligibility was due to some authorities reporting against legal eligibility under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and others reporting against locally defined eligibility criteria. Local eligibility criteria usually included care leavers who had been looked after away from home and excluded care leavers who had been looked after at home.

- Definitions of engagement across authorities differed according to a range of criteria:
  - Modes of contact, e.g. face-to-face, texts, telephone, or care leaver's preferred method

- Frequency of contact, e.g. at least every three months, every six months etc.
- Nature of contact, e.g. whether or not contacts were deemed 'advisory only'
- Whether or not the care leaver was assigned to a named worker
- Who the care leaver was, e.g. whether or not they had been looked after at home or whether or not they were over 21
- Who contact was with, e.g. whether or not contact was with a 'duty' service or TCAC team, or whether or not contact was known (by TCAC services) to be taking place with a range of other local services working in partnership arrangements
- Whether or not the care leaver was considered to be disabled.

Thus, in some authorities, relatively high rates of engagement may be due to excluding groups of care leavers who are more difficult to engage or due to counting types of contact not counted by other authorities.

Those local authorities who report their ability to engage care leavers using relatively favourable definitions risk losing the intrinsic value of this information, for example they will be unable to distinguish between care leavers who receive different intensities and types of service. Furthermore, comparisons across authorities are compromised by the different approaches taken. We suspect that the variations explored in this study may also pertain to statistical returns to Scottish Government.

It should also be noted that additional data provided by some participants later contradicted the information given in response to these survey questions about eligibility and engagement.

In order to explore the position of care leavers in a number of different groups we provide analyses by subgroup below. This includes Gender, Age, Placement Type, Disability and Ethnicity; we also briefly discuss issues related to sexuality and to asylum seekers.

Gender

Across 16 local authorities who were able to provide data, 1,054 male care leavers were reported to be eligible for services and 718 (68%) engaged with services. Seven hundred and sixty four female care leavers were reported to be eligible for services and 576 (75%) engaged with services. This reflects national statistics (Scottish Government 2013).

In terms of variation, the proportion of female care leavers engaged was greater than the proportion of male care leavers in ten authorities; this pattern was reversed in five authorities and in one authority the proportion was equal as 100% were reported as engaged.

Age

Not all respondents were able to report data for all ages and, as previously mentioned, the numbers of young people eligible for services is different at different age groups. Based on data from between 13 and 16 authorities, the proportion of eligible young people who receive a service varies for different ages. Most noticeably it seems that care leavers aged 15 were the most likely to receive a service (91%) and care leavers 21 years and over were least likely to receive a service (57%). Other age groups were engaged at rates between 67 and 75% (see Figure 1).
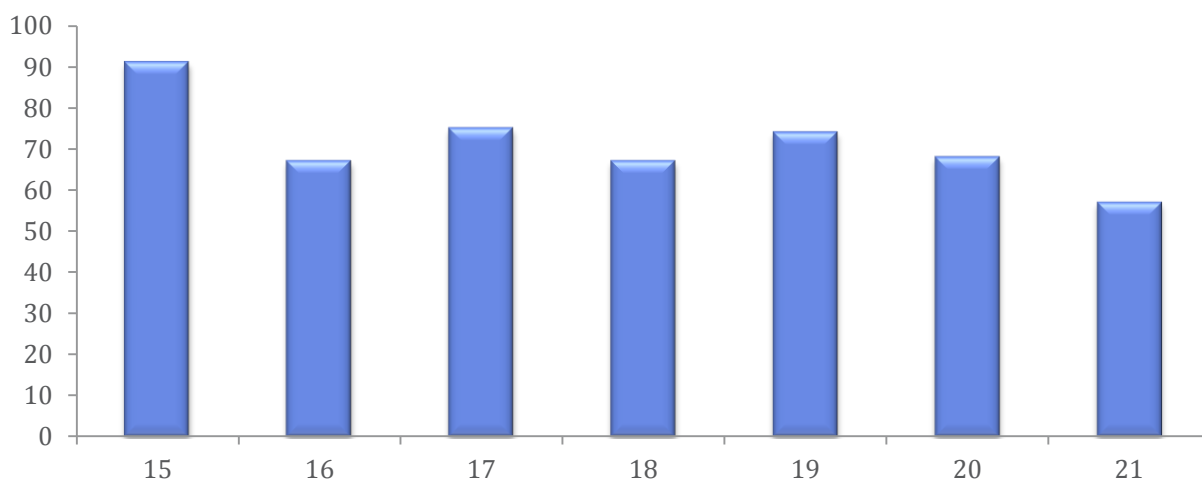

Figure 1. Proportions engaged (%) at different ages (15 to 21+ years)

Fifteen-year-old care leavers are likely to be seen as having high levels of vulnerability compared to other age groups, whilst care leavers aged 21 or older may be viewed as less of a priority. However, there is variation in the proportions of care leavers engaged with TCAC services by age across authority. Some local authorities have higher levels of engagement with younger care leavers whilst some authorities have higher levels of engagement with older care leavers.

A small number of authorities stated that 100% or close to 100% of eligible care leavers aged 15-20 were engaged in services despite reporting elsewhere (relating to gender etc.) that lower numbers of care leavers were engaged. It is likely that different priorities and processes for recording data items result in these inconsistencies.

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Placement type

Statistical data about placement type were not collected in this research; however, participants were asked to provide qualitative information about this area. The following themes were identified:

- In some authorities, care leavers who had been looked after away from home were more likely to be supported by TCAC services; therefore, care leavers who had been looked after at home or in kinship care were less likely to receive support
- Other authorities provided support on the basis of highest level of assessed need rather than a consideration of placement type
- Some TCAC services offered all care leavers support, regardless of placement type.

It is possible that issues such as staff and care leaver expectations and cultural norms around gender, age and placement type may result in some of the patterns of engagement outlined above. For example, young people in residential care may anticipate using TCAC services. Equally, variation may be a more complex relationship between a number of characteristics. Thus, caution is required when interpreting data regarding service provision and uptake.

Equalities statistics: a note

The accuracy of disability and ethnicity data is particularly variable and trends and analyses presented here are only indicative. Findings suggest that information about disability and ethnicity data may not be collected systematically and consequently proportions of those engaged may be masked (disability) or artificially inflated (certain ethnic groups). It is useful to explore these data, however, to consider the questions that they raise for future data collection and service delivery.

Disability

Reporting for eligible and engaged disabled care leavers varied along a number of dimensions. Some local authorities recorded care leavers as disabled only if they were supported by specialist disability services, consequently excluding care leavers who were disabled but had lower support needs.

Local authorities (n=19) reported that between zero and 167 care leavers were known to have a disability (mean 24) with between zero and 56 receiving a service (mean 8). In total 33% of disabled care leavers were reported to be engaged with services. Three local authorities reported that no disabled care leavers were eligible for or engaged with TCAC services; this is surprising since there are known to be many disabled looked after children. One participant spoke of the difficulty in securing a 'diagnosis' for care leavers and suggested that as a consequence more care leavers were disabled than were reported in published statistics.

The additional lack of distinction between care leavers with complex needs who receive support from adult disability services and care leavers who receive support from throughcare services limits understanding and may mask the needs of both groups.

Ethnicity

In general local authorities reported that there were few care leavers from a Black and minority ethnic (BME) background, although greater numbers of care leavers from BME backgrounds were reported in larger cities and towns. Nine authorities reported that between one and four eligible care leavers were from a BME background, with all care leavers in seven of these authorities receiving a service. Seven authorities reported that there were no eligible or engaged care leavers from a BME background. A further two authorities reported higher numbers of eligible care leavers (mean 95) with over 75% of care leavers engaged in each authority.

Sexuality

Information about care leaver sexuality was not requested in the survey because we considered it unlikely that this information would be widely aggregated. However, it is reported that sexuality may be a particular issue; for example, some care leavers may experience discrimination related to their sexuality. Therefore the collection of data in this area may be warranted.

Asylum seekers

Asylum seekers are technically not care leavers and not legally entitled to support from TCAC services (National Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, Schedule 3 Section 1). However, we found that throughcare and aftercare services, particularly those in larger towns and cities, did on occasion provide services to asylum seekers.

Care leaver population flow

The throughcare and aftercare sector is, by its nature, one where there are significant levels of turnover of care leavers using services. These changes in care leaver population have implications for service planning and delivery. Therefore, we aimed to capture information about the extent of anticipated change in the care leaver population according to the following:

- Number of new care leavers anticipated
- Number of care leavers who ceased receiving services
- Number of care leavers who ceased using services but later returned
- Length of time care leavers are engaged with or open to services.

These data are not routinely collected and some of the information provided may be inaccurate. However, bearing this warning in mind, there is value in exploring these

data as they may have important implications for the TCAC sector such as anticipating the extent of new care leaver numbers or projecting changes in the age of leaving care.

Based on data from 17 authorities, the number of care leavers ceasing to receive services between 1st August 2011 and 31st July 2012 ranged from zero to 129 (mean 23). The number of anticipated new care leavers ranged from four to 143 (mean 33) (across 18 authorities).

Breaking this down further, three authorities did not expect any care leavers to stop using services and all local authorities anticipated there would be new care leavers. Of 16 authorities who were able to provide figures for new care leavers and those ceasing, nine expected a greater number of new care leavers than care leavers ceasing to use services, five anticipated a greater number of care leavers ceasing to use services and one authority expected equal numbers of new care leavers and those ceasing to use services.

There was evidence to suggest that several authorities continued to provide support (emotional, personal and financial) to care leavers whose cases had been 'closed', for example those who were over 21, but this is not captured in national data and indicates that although care leavers may formally cease using services for the purpose of data recording, they may still receive some form of informal support from services.

Qualitative analysis revealed that many care leavers have fluctuating patterns of service use, sometimes using the service for a while followed by periods of no or limited use of the service. A number of young people used TCAC services only during a time of crisis. However, it seems that statistical data did not capture this high level of fluctuation such that across the 11 authorities who reported this information, an average of five care leavers (range zero – 19) were reported to have ceased receiving formal support but returning at a later date. It seems that in most cases where care leavers had fluctuating patterns of service use, they were recorded as 'open' to a named worker or 'engaged' with services.

The average length of time care leavers were engaged with or open to services can be estimated using the mean age of care leavers referred to (16.6 years n=13) and disengaging from services (19.1 years n=15). Thus the average period between referral to services and disengagement was 3.5 years.

However, it should be noted that age at referral is not necessarily consistent with age at engagement with services because in some circumstances care leavers will be made aware of TCAC service but will remain a looked after child for some time thereafter.

Reasons for engagement and disengagement are likely to vary and we would therefore avoid making judgements about what should be considered an appropriate length of time for care leavers to be involved with services. However the extent of intra-authority variation seems notably high and it may be useful to test the reliability of these data further, for example, by exploring the circumstances in which the average (mean)

length of support appears to be very low (e.g. one year or less). It may be that there are further differences in data recording, for example that some authorities are reporting age at the start and end of each episode of support whilst others are reporting age at first and last contact with the service.

Data about population flows would be much more informative if collected over a number of years so that patterns and trends could be detected; given the likelihood that there will be changes year on year, this would provide valuable information for authorities who need to plan their service delivery and resource allocation.

Prioritisation

Within any system with finite and restricted budgets it often becomes necessary to allocate services according to need or other criteria. The research explored how local authorities allocated resources and how (if at all) they prioritised different groups of care leavers. Participants were aware that they had responsibilities to all eligible care leavers but faced with current resource constraints they made decisions about how services were allocated.

Their responses indicated that, for most, priority was determined with reference to relevant legislation and guidance and their reading that these explicitly or implicitly inferred different levels of 'duty' to provide support. As a result, whilst there was evidence of flexibility at the individual level, the planned provision of services became less a matter of individual need and more a matter of membership of specific priority groups. For example, younger care leavers where a statutory duty prevailed (up to 18 or 19 years old) were often seen as a priority group but older care leavers were only prioritised on an *individual basis*:

> *Priority age groups are the 15 to 19 year olds as they require the most intensive input and are a priority as defined by legislation and policy. The same can be said of those aged over 18 and up to 21 depending on their circumstances. Much of the priority is assessed on an individual basis for those young people over 19. (Survey participant)*

Similarly, whilst several respondents stated that care leavers from all placement types may want or need support, placement history was used to determine priority and, in some areas, eligibility. For example, care leavers who were looked after at home were both less likely to be provided with information about services or to have full access to TCAC services. Participants again explained this in terms of having a greater 'duty' to support those who had been accommodated:

> *Like many other authorities that I am aware of, we do not normally provide support to young people who have only been looked after at home and who are numerically a far larger group. This is purely a resource [and] staffing issue – given that our duties to young people who have been looked after & accommodated are greater and occupy all of our time. This does not*

necessarily imply that young people who were looked after at home have lesser needs – the opposite is often the case! (Survey participant)

Services to members of lower priority groups were often limited to access to duty services or information and advisory guidance only. Members of these groups often missed out on access to specialist housing and similar services. For example, in some areas, whilst not initiating a service for care leavers who had been looked after at home, TCAC teams were able to provide a limited service when approached:

We have also had young people who have not been [accommodated] asking us for support and advice and guidance. We will offer advice and guidance to these young people and point them in a direction of services that can help. We are of the mind that we have a responsibility towards all young people in our community and will assist if we can. (Survey participant)

In other authorities care leavers who had been looked after at home did not receive a service from TCAC staff but:

...their support remains with the children and families team. Children and families workers will use the specialist [TCAC] team for advice and guidance. They [care leavers] still have access to all other specialist services for [young people] including employment schemes. (Survey participant)

Despite suggesting that their own response to resource pressures could be framed in terms of their prescribed duties, participants saw legislation and guidance as potential sources of good practice, even where they felt this would be unachievable:

It is unclear what scope there is at the current time given the amount of proposed changes to occur. Realistically in light of the budget cuts, priority will be given to those young people aged 15-19 but good practice will be made clear that with the implementation of the Children and Young People Bill in 2015 in combination with current good practice guides and legislation that all young people entitled to a TCAC should receive one. (Survey participant)

In this way, legislation seems to be regarded as having a subtext permitting the 'real' priority groups to be identified as well as offering glimpses of what would happen in an idealised service. Providers' pragmatic responses to resource limitations were therefore rationalised in terms of comparative levels of duty.

Transitions into TCAC services

In many authorities care leavers who were not considered to be members of a priority group were never specifically introduced to the service nor 'allocated' to a TCAC worker. Care leavers who did belong to priority groups were introduced to TCAC services at different points in time depending on their plans, circumstances or placement type.

The timing and nature of these introductions was considered to be important and

needed to be carefully managed to avoid undue suggestions to young person that they *should* be leaving care. Young people were commonly informed about throughcare and aftercare services as part of the LAC review process or by children and families' social workers.

Participants in some authorities suggested they referred young people to TCAC services at a younger age but did not actively review the case or provide services until an appropriate time for the young person:

> *There are plans in place for transition, however, we are also careful not to give the young people the impression that they are being 'forced' out of care. The priority for this [younger] age group is to keep them in the care system for as long as it takes to prepare them for independence. At this stage we will take advice from the social worker holding the case as to how we progress... at this stage don't want them to feel as though they are moving out. (Survey participant)*

Engagement and non-engagement

One difficulty identified by participants was the number of care leavers who decided not to use TCAC services. Deciding not to use services stemmed, it was thought, from several interrelated factors:

- Young people had a desire to be free of the care system and the stigma of being looked after, particularly if they have had a long history of receiving social work input:

> *It is however, recognised that this is common and that it is necessary to keep some form of communication open to them. (Survey participant)*

- Systems, processes and culture, including social worker and Children's Hearings, allowed young people to disengage:

> *The 'I'm 16' culture means the most damaged, complex young people who have experienced multiple placements and are the most disenfranchised, can 'choose' to leave care and workers/ Children's Hearings allow this on the grounds of their 'non-engagement'. (Survey participant)*

- Care leavers were not always thought to be ready to use services until age 19 or 20, i.e. to consider taking responsibility for themselves in terms of accommodation and independent living:

> *This has to be taken into consideration about the need to support young people into adulthood and the resources that require to be available. (Survey participant)*

Young people, however, were likely to initiate (or reinitiate) contact with throughcare services, or return after a period of non-engagement:

When there [has been a] period of crisis or after a time of being alone and the harsh realities of being a young adult hit home (Survey participant).

To overcome the difficulties of sporadic or non-engagement, a few participants spoke of an important role played by present or former service users:

The service has now been up and running for over two years and the voices of their peers is stronger than the workers. Young people currently using the service are encouraging peers who are leaving care to link up with us for support. (Survey participant)

Similarly, participants spoke of the responsibility that TCAC services have to enable care leavers to see the value of using TCAC services:

Care leavers need to understand that there are benefits to being involved with the service. The TCAC service needs to be able to demonstrate this (Survey participant).

Service structure and content

Structure of TCAC services

Stein (2012) identified six TCAC service structures commonly used by authorities to deliver leaving care services (see Appendix 1 for further detail about the different service structures). More than half of local authorities (n=15) had a centrally organised specialist service for TCAC, with a few authorities representing each of the other service structures (Figure 2). 'Other' service structures included centralised services for some aspects of delivery with dedicated or locality-based services for different groups of care leavers. Dual service delivery with a department other than children and families services was also a form of 'other' service structure.
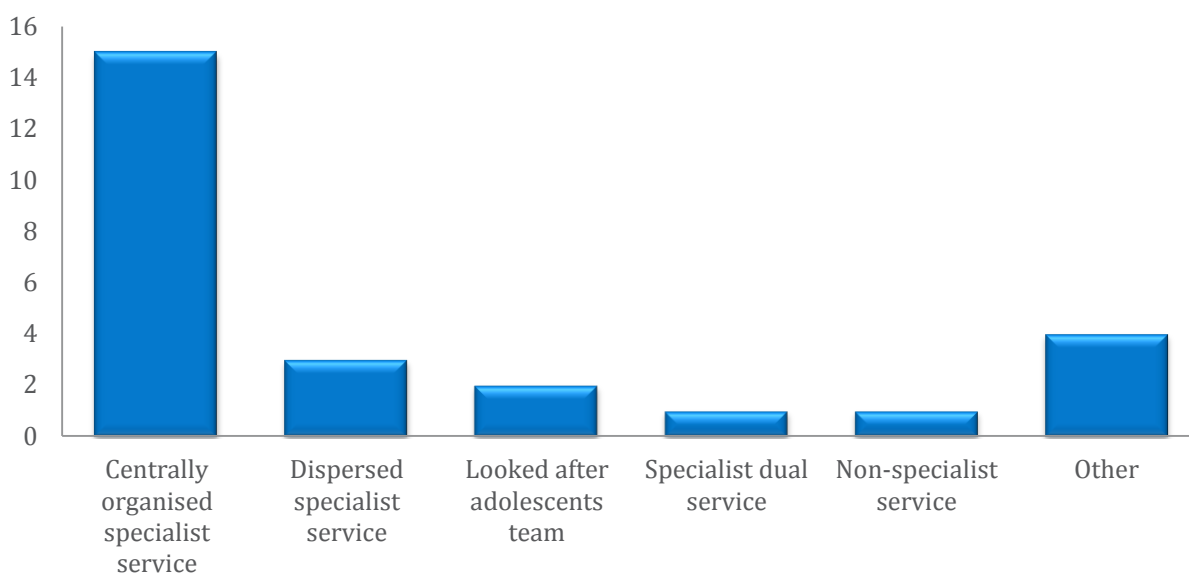

Figure 2. TCAC service structure

Whilst centralised services were the most common structure, there were many differences across authorities, for example, different staffing complements, numbers of care leavers using services, services offered, geography (e.g. rural and urban), partnership arrangements, housing availability, prioritisation of care leaver groups, perceived priority of TCAC within the authority and so on. The multitude of factors playing a role in TCAC service structure makes it difficult and often inappropriate, to offer broad comparisons between one type of service structure and another.

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Content of TCAC services

Participants were asked a number of questions about the services offered to care leavers. In particular they were asked to consider the following service types:

- Personal and Emotional (P&E) Casework
- Social and Emotional (S&E) Group work
- Drop-in service
- TCAC duty service
- Accommodation
- Tenancy/Housing support
- Practical skills training
- Education Employment and Training (EET) support
- TCAC health support
- Other (written-in).

For each they were asked whether this was a service they offered directly through the TCAC service, whether it was offered through a provider such as a statutory partner or whether the TCAC service commissioned the service from another provider such as the third sector. Where it was indicated that a service was offered, participants were asked to indicate whether they considered this a 'core service' (with high or medium usage).

The chart below shows the percentage of respondents who indicated that core services were offered by each of the three provider groups. This allows us to begin to understand the overall shape of provision by considering which services are numerically important and the ways in which these services are typically delivered. The data table can be found in Appendix 2.
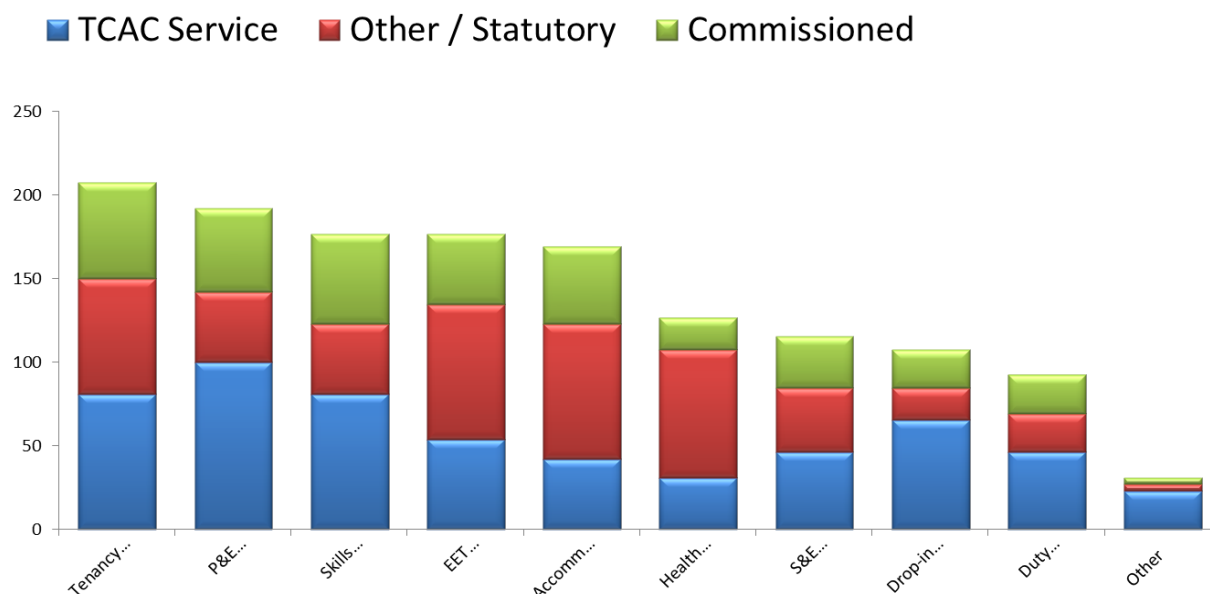

Figure 3. Percentages seen as core service, by three provider types

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'Other' services identified included financial support, various forms of supported accommodation, ongoing foster care, support with substance misuse and advice and support for young parents.

The relative contribution of each service provider type to each of the main service areas is illustrated further below in Figure 4. As before, (clockwise) blue represents services provided directly by TCAC services, red represents services provided by statutory agencies and green represents services commissioned from other providers.
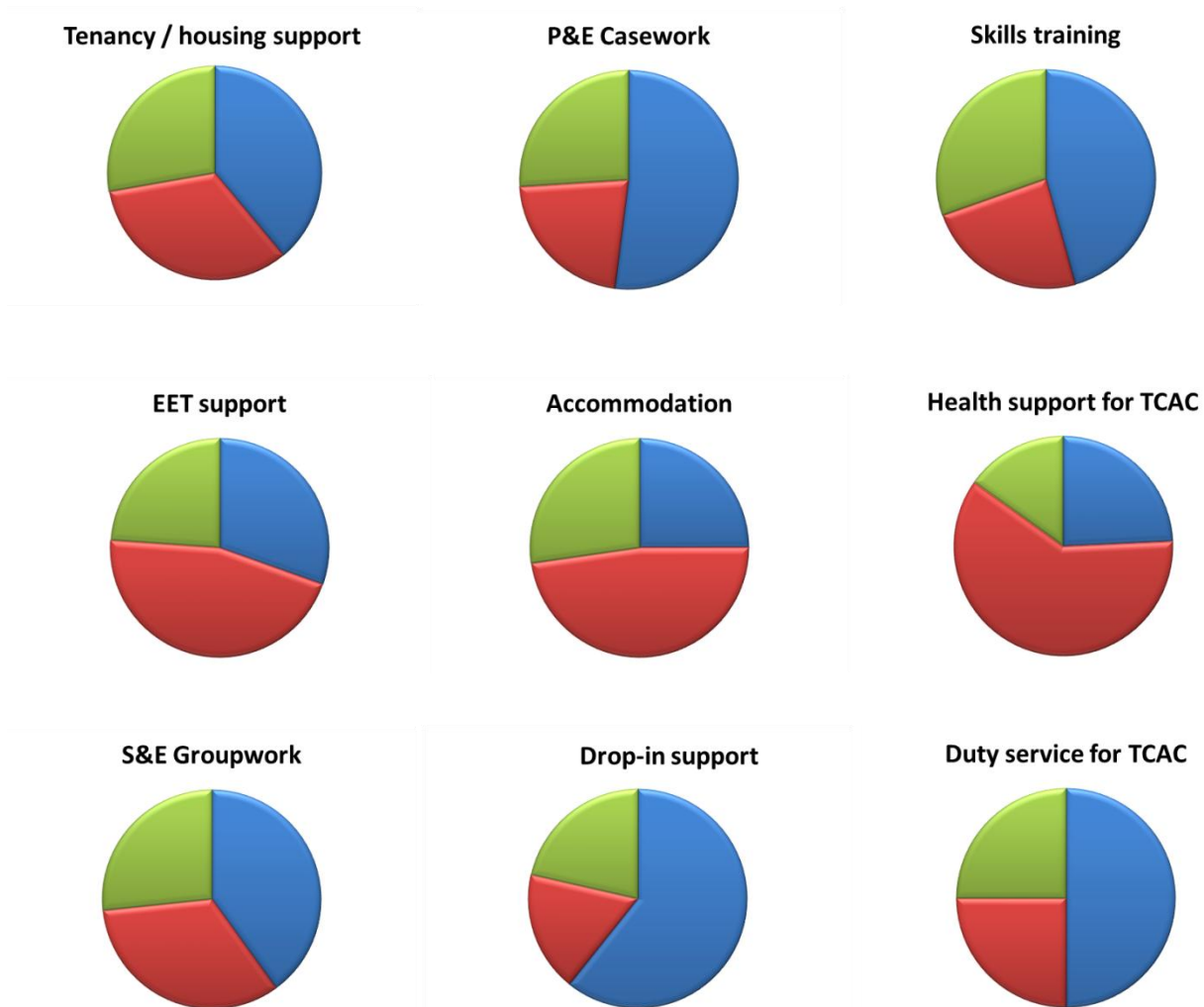

Figure 4 Relative contributions from different provider types

Whilst there are some types of service where one provider type appears to make a larger contribution than others this is not unexpected. For example, services provided by the NHS are likely to dominate health provision and services provided by statutory housing providers are likely to dominate the provision of accommodation. Equally it may be unsurprising that TCAC services directly contribute much of the drop-in and personal and emotional services.

However, it is notable is that in all areas of provision there appears to be at least an element of contribution from all three service provider types. The involvement of different provider types is promising, since as long as these services are sufficient and well-coordinated, it may indicate the possibility of integration and partnership working to provide appropriate and responsive services for care leavers.

Further exploratory analysis was conducted to establish whether the balance of provider contribution was different in areas that did or did not characterise their own structure as a 'centralised' services model. Whilst minor differences were noted, as would be expected with this small sample size (N=26), few of these reached statistical significance at p=<0.05. In addition, where differences did appear statistically significant despite the small sample size, the effect size was relatively small. Consequently we feel there is little value in reporting these somewhat tentative differences beyond stating that there may be some minor differences in the way in which centralised and non-centralised TCAC structures work with other partners.

Staffing and Workloads

Participants were asked a number of questions about levels of staffing, their level of qualification, area of expertise and the size of workload. For example, they were asked how many staff (fulltime equivalent) had a primary frontline responsibility to care leavers.

Local authorities who deliver services to care leavers via area teams or dispersed central services were unable to give figures for primary throughcare responsibility as all workers were deemed to have a duty to work with young people leaving care:

> *All children and family social workers can have responsibility for care leavers. Social work assistants tend to hold cases for young people who have left care and require less support (Survey participant)*

In total, the authorities (n=23) able to provide numbers reported a workforce of 215 members. This included 76 qualified social workers, 92 support workers and 47 other staff. Figure 5 illustrates the number of workers delivering services to care leavers as a proportion of the total throughcare and aftercare workforce.
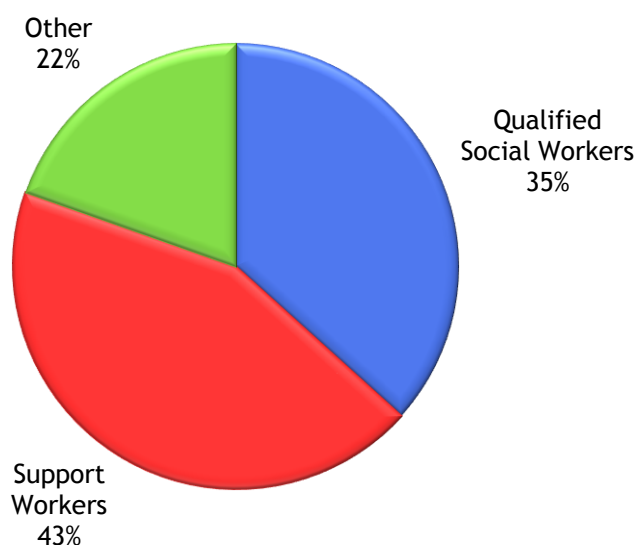
Figure 5. Proportions of different staffing groups

The 'other' category was made up of a diverse range of staffing and skills deemed necessary by throughcare teams to facilitate and deliver services to care leavers. This included workers focused on housing, employment, family support and health as well as a small number of administrative or managerial staff. Some services have seen the need for specialised posts and have developed their work to reflect the needs of the young people they are working with:

> *A service review identified the need for a number of specialist posts within the service, to complement and add to the existing skills within the team... the range of knowledge and access to services for young people will be enhanced and made more direct, thereby improving their service provision. (Survey participant)*

> *The complement of staff and retention of the core staff team offers young people and professionals continuity of worker and assists the development of relationships which supports young people through the transition process. Workers come from different backgrounds such as education, youth work, social care, housing so provide a variety of skills. (Survey participant)*

Most authorities reported a discrepancy in the average number of care leavers and the ideal number of care leavers they would expect one member of staff to effectively engage with. Participants were asked about the average number of care leavers for whom staff were currently named workers; the mean number was 18. When asked what the ideal number would be, the mean number indicated was 13.

This difference was attributed variously to increasing numbers of care leavers, resource restrictions and competing agendas within localities e.g. child protection. A small number of participants, however, spoke of a desire to have a higher number of care leavers on their caseload and support a greater number of care leavers. This occurred,

for example, in circumstances where two members of staff were assigned to one care leaver who had a high level of needs. Local geography also impacted on the ideal and realistic workload of staff as did often diverse levels of need of young people leaving care:

Caseloads have been increasing slowly but steadily for a number of years – 2 main reasons for this: 1) Steady growth in numbers of looked after and accommodated children & 2) change of status of kinship care placements to looked after children (thereby qualifying for support from our service) – without any commensurate increase in staffing levels. (Survey participant)

Participants were also asked who had responsibility for case management. A number of arrangements prevailed. Twelve authorities reported that TCAC held sole case management responsibility though in some areas this followed an initial transitional phase of leaving care where it was considered beneficial for the case to be held by the Children and Families team as they have the existing relationship with the young person. Ten participants reported that cases were jointly managed, with a range of departments sharing responsibility. In four authorities case management responsibility was retained by children and families teams.

Fluctuation and service change

Information presented so far about service structure and content represents a snapshot in time. In reality we are aware that TCAC services are subject to frequent change. Figure 6 below shows that of the 23 authorities who were able to provide data, 19 had experienced change to either or both service structure and provision in the past two years. Of these 19 services, 13 anticipated further change in the next two years.
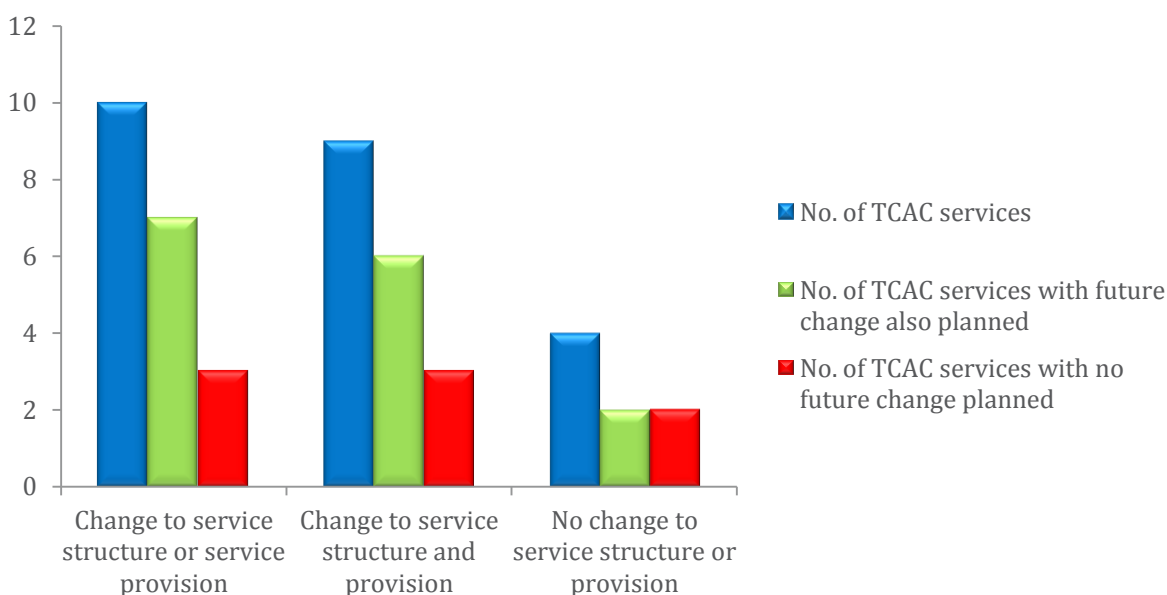

Legend:
- No. of TCAC services
- No. of TCAC services with future change also planned
- No. of TCAC services with no future change planned

Figure 6 Change and anticipated change to TCAC services

Changes to service structure could be large or small scale and often had an impact on service delivery. Some of the larger scale structure changes are described here:

- Development of a greater range of services for care leavers and employment of increased numbers of TCAC staff including dedicated staff from partner organisations such as housing, education and mental health
- Developing a combined service delivery structure with commissioned services
- Bringing TCAC services back in house (having previously commissioned services)
- TCAC teams being dissolved and either brought into generic children's and families' teams or new services offered to a broader range of young people
- Acquisition of new accommodation for care leavers with a role for TCAC services in managing the accommodation.

Structural change was generally in response to service reviews or wider organisational re-structuring. Where change was implemented in response to a service review this was generally positive and reflected an increase in services or staff for care leavers. Changes that came about following a period of organisational re-structuring were usually associated with cost savings and a renewed focus for the authority in achieving outcomes for less.

Changes to service delivery, on the other hand, were related to sources of funding, input from care leavers and as a consequence of structural change. For example:

- Diversification of services via achieving funding
- Loss of services via end of funding stream
- New services offered following consultation with care leavers
- Identification of gaps in delivery (in-house) or development of current services
- Increased partnership working.

In some cases the absence of change was not viewed positively, for example, when visions for a multi-disciplinary TCAC team had not been realised.

Some new services had been introduced specifically to address care leaver needs, including out-of-hours support, care leaver groups and peer mentoring.

Many authorities anticipated future changes to service structure and provision. For some this was related to uncertainty about the future of TCAC teams, with anxiety that TCAC teams may be amalgamated or TCAC staff dispersed to generic teams.

The picture of constant large scale change had implications for the provision of a consistent, good quality service for care leavers. It was suggested that introducing new systems and services takes time; loss of funding and service restructuring can be accompanied by loss of staff. The impact of this on direct work with care leavers should be taken into consideration.

Stakeholder engagement in service development is a feature of national policy (Rutter, Manley, Weaver, Crawford, & Fulop, 2004) and inspection criteria (Care Inspectorate, 2013). The benefits of engaging service users in service development are thought to include ensuring services meet users' needs and having a transparent, open delivery process (Rutter et al., 2004).

All participating TCAC services had mechanisms in place for care leavers to contribute to service development; for a number of authorities these opportunities were limited to chances to provide feedback about individual services received, but in other authorities there was a wider range of service development activities. Some authorities were in the process of improving service engagement opportunities.

Appendix 3 outlines a number of approaches to allow care leavers to contribute to service development.

Approaches to corporate parenting

Although corporate parenting was not explored directly in the survey, 17 of 26 authorities referred to it as an important factor impacting, positively or negatively, on services for care leavers. Corporate parenting, according to *These are our Bairns* (Scottish Government, 2008), has three core elements, defined as:

- A statutory duty for local authorities and other agencies to promote the welfare of looked after children and care leavers
- The co-ordination of activities across different organisations and professionals
- Any direct work with children and young people to promote their development.

These core elements of corporate parenting can be equated roughly to three linked domains: strategic (policy and planning), operational (inter-organisational partnerships) and practice. This is a very broad definition of corporate parenting, which in essence covers *all* aspects of work with care leavers (and looked after children).

These participants often used 'corporate parenting' to refer to strategic level input for care leavers; however, they sometimes used examples of partnership working, service delivery or individual work to illustrate the effectiveness, or otherwise, of corporate parenting. Generally these examples were used to highlight the need for accountability of various corporate partners.

Discussion and comments around corporate parenting focused largely on barriers or enabling factors, along with some examples of the impact of corporate parenting (or lack of corporate parenting).

Where active corporate parenting programmes existed, events and meetings were intended to engage partners more fully in the provision of services to care leavers and

looked after children; care leavers and looked after children were involved in some of these events:

We've got a quarterly corporate parenting meeting which takes place in here. Lots of partners are invited and... twice a year, we invite young people to that event, meeting to share their views. And we have a corporate parenting conference usually every 18 months which is a really big event and we invite lots of young people [to] speak at the conference and there were a couple of singers so it was a really, really good event... and we've got all the representatives from education, health all the partner agencies that we'll be working with. (Interview participant)

Not all authorities had active strategic corporate parenting programmes and in some of these authorities events were initiated or driven by TCAC staff to engage senior management and heads of service, as well as partners.

Corporate Parenting Groups or Boards were set up in some authorities, comprising senior staff from a range of partner agencies. Care leavers were often asked to attend Board meetings to be involved in discussions and presentations. It was felt however that Corporate Parenting Boards did not always sufficiently involve TCAC services in decision making; the result was that although decisions may have been well intentioned they may not have been introduced at the right time: *'I think it's good, aspirational, I just don't know how realistic it's going to be' (Interview participant)*. It was noted that membership of Corporate Parenting Groups should reflect care leavers' needs; moreover staff groups and young people should be represented.

In authorities with a less active approach to corporate parenting, corporate parenting Boards were less likely to exist:

Obviously we've got our policy, it was written in 2006, I'm not aware of any corporate parent group, certainly never been consulted about any group so I'm not aware of people meeting, discussing it. (Interview participant)

Corporate partners reported to have the strongest links to TCAC services were local authority housing and accommodation services and children and families services. Other partners that were commonly mentioned included: employment and training services, particularly Skills Development Scotland and the Job Centre; Education services, including colleges and universities; and youth justice services. By contrast, there was little reference to health and police as active partners and only one reference to fire services as a corporate partner.

Although corporate parenting is clearly embedded at varying levels across authorities, it seems that throughcare and aftercare teams often felt the need to adopt a championing role, informing agencies and organisations of their duties and the issues that care leavers face. Their championing and advocacy role even included informing care leavers of their rights under the corporate parenting agenda:

We did a questionnaire, I think for the Children's Bill and not one of them knew what a corporate parent was. I think we interviewed 16-18 kids and not one of them knew what a corporate parent was. (Interview participant)

It is interesting to note that from the perspective of these participants, there were a number of subtly different roles in influencing others in respect of corporate parenting. Throughcare and aftercare teams portrayed themselves as encouraging heads of social services and other local authority departments to engage with corporate parenting, whilst at strategic level, heads of service and other senior management were represented as trying to ensure that other departments or agencies met their statutory duties. There was a suggestion that participants in this study did not always feel confident or empowered, for whatever reason, to 'hold others to account'.
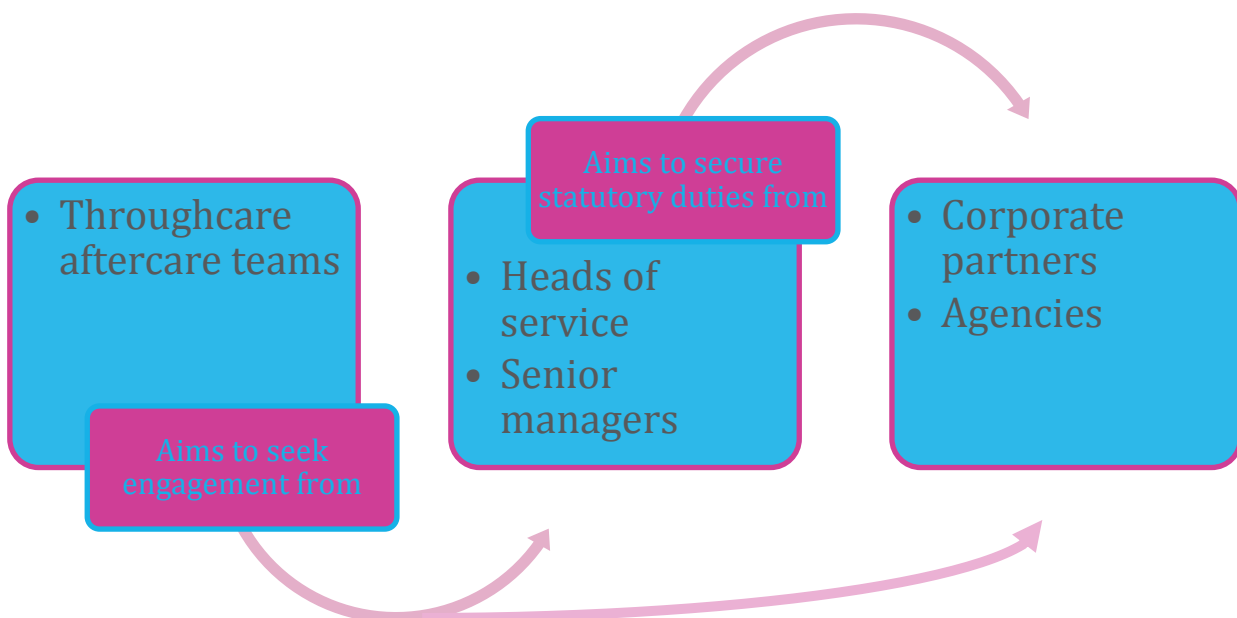

Figure 7. Lines of influence

Others' lack of understanding of corporate parenting duties and responsibilities and of care leaver issues were two significant concerns for these participants. They reported that this could make it difficult to establish connections with corporate partners. Not infrequently, these bodies were considered to lack a formal recognition of their statutory duties, although support provided informally by individuals could be valuable:

I'm not sure that all social work services appreciate what young people being looked after and accommodated require in terms of preparation and support for the time when they will no longer be looked after and accommodated. I'm not sure that they grasp the corporate parenting agenda either, as it is perceived as something provided by throughcare teams and

not the local authority and partners together. Although I do acknowledge the additional and very valuable support provided informally by former residential units, their staff, former foster carers and supported carers. (Survey participant)

Staff in social services and other corporate partners, including children and families fieldwork teams, were often portrayed as having limited or no understanding of care leaver issues. This included limited appreciation of the challenges faced by care leavers:

When a young person moves on from residential care, they leave a relatively controlled and structured environment. They need to cope with new responsibilities and a higher level of freedom. The timing of the move from the residential unit may not have been their choice. This can therefore be a time of turmoil, adaptation and loss. (Survey participant)

Senior corporate parents

A few participants noted strong support from Chief Executives or senior managers in promoting services for care leavers:

There is a corporate parenting strategy which is driven by the Chief Exec [who] really wants to see improved outcomes for young people. (Interview participant)

Effective support from Chief Executives was considered to play a direct role in creating awareness of care leaver issues at senior levels and developing a general culture of understanding of corporate responsibilities to care leavers:

I think all senior managers are now aware of, or beginning to become much more aware of, the issues and responsibilities towards young people who are looked after. And I think it's starting to become embedded in that whole cultural aspect. (Interview participant)

However, in many areas there was not thought to be committed senior support for corporate parenting. Sometimes this was portrayed as a lack of focus, whilst in other areas it was felt that the response was at times tokenistic:

Corporate parenting sometimes appears to get lip service (Survey respondent).

Even where it did prevail, a strong approach to corporate parenting at a strategic level was not necessarily associated with increased levels of understanding at practice level; consequently front-line staff did not always accept their responsibilities to care leavers:

Some of the issues that relate to corporate parenting don't always filter down to staff, like their housing officers. They actually have responsibility to treat these young people slightly differently because they have a care history. And they say, 'No we don't. We'll treat them the same as everybody else'. (Interview participant)

Impact of corporate parenting

The advent of the corporate parenting agenda was thought to have had a number of positive impacts on services for care leavers. Key benefits were reported to be improved access to a wider range of services for care leavers and the establishment of formal partnership agreements across a number of agencies. The range of benefits included:

- Increased awareness of corporate parenting responsibilities and duties
- Improved services or opportunities for care leavers, particularly over time
- Increased priority given to care leavers
- Increased staffing through partnership agreements
- Increased awareness and raised profile of care leavers and the issues they may face
- Improved relationships with staff in partner organisations
- Culture shift and attitude change in partner organisations
- Partnership working to identify services for care leavers, with joint bids being submitted to funders and grant-making bodies
- Funding for events etc.

However, these positive impacts were not universal; care leavers could still experience difficulties accessing services:

> *The various gate-keeping between services does mean that young people experience a number of frustrations and barriers before they access the appropriate services. (Survey participant)*

Without senior support, funding was often limited or there were limited opportunities to influence financial, resource and strategic decisions to improve services for care leavers. Similarly, even where there were good levels of corporate parenting across a number of agencies, there could be individual agencies that were not effectively involved. For example, whilst LAAC nurses were seen as important links to health organisations enabling access to services for care leavers, other health services were not seen to be closely involved in the corporate parenting agenda.

Parenting individuals

Several participants indicated that throughcare teams are (or should be) accountable for providing care leavers with the same opportunities and support that 'good parents' provide for their children. A number of areas were identified by participants where improvement was possible:

- Providing appropriate support and guidance:

> *We've actually got a responsibility, we are their corporate parents ... and it's our job to make sure we're doing that and having some ownership round about it. (Interview participant)*

- Accepting the mistakes that young people make:

  [They] need to learn from that, you know... You learned your lesson, we bailed you out, don't do it again. Just a general kind of parenting approach, you're obviously trying to establish that within your own team and then across other services. (Interview participant)

- Addressing accommodation issues if moves away from home or placements don't work out:

  Again, there's a number of young people who dip their toe in the water and it's maybe not for them. I suspect that's going to be a terrible problem for all local authorities because you can't keep a placement open for six months or a year. It's a challenge, but equally we have parental [responsibility], we're corporate parents. Other, inverted commas, 'families' manage to have their kids return. (Interview participant)

- Providing appropriate financial support:

  Young people who are in foster care are getting clothing, are getting fed, their meals provided, a bit of pocket money and yet because most of our section 29 budgets are fairly parsimonious, we have to think really, really hard about whether we can buy [care leavers] a new pair of shoes... It's not about being extravagant, it's about being a good corporate parent. (Interview participant)

In the current financial climate it is not surprising that some participants mentioned the financial implications of developing corporate parenting or meeting corporate parenting policy commitments. For example, changes to placement funding arrangements in one local authority had caused concern about placement stability and the likely effect this would have on care leavers:

Our corporate parenting commitment states quite happily that young people should be able to remain in care till 18, [but] increasingly the pressure is getting pushed down to team management to question placements, having to justify them, only grant six months funding... (Interview participant)

As corporate parents, participants also anticipated that the financial consequences of welfare reform cuts on care leavers would have to be met by local authorities:

Financial impact of welfare reform – including the 'bedroom tax', implementation of direct payments of Housing Benefit to claimants, increased scope of benefit sanctions, budgeting on monthly payments of universal credit, etc.. All of these things will impact on local authorities as the corporate parent for care leavers, as these young people generally do not have other family resources to fall back on. (Survey respondent)

Recording and using data

One of the aims of the research was to examine issues surrounding data collection and monitoring and recording of care leaver outcomes. Findings strongly suggested that authorities found these areas to be problematic. Participants identified three key areas:

- Maintaining up-to-date accurate databases of care leaver information
- Providing data for Scottish Government Children Looked After Statistics
- Measuring and recording information about care leaver outcomes.

Maintaining up-to-date accurate databases

Participants outlined a need to record information such as care leaver addresses and contact details, employment and housing status, age and equalities criteria. Challenges in maintaining accurate and up-to-date data included the extent to which TCAC staff had contact with care leavers. Care leavers frequently moved homes and their use of services could fluctuate; during periods of non-engagement it was particularly difficult for staff to collect data. Frequent house moves and changes of address created difficulties in recording the true extent of homelessness among care leavers:

There are numerous difficulties in collecting data as young people often move address and often lose contact for periods of time. (Survey participant)

Collecting accurate data on the true reflection of homeless episodes is very difficult. (Survey participant)

Care leaver reticence to disclose information also contributed to inaccuracies in case files or databases:

We don't collate enough data, some of which is… due to lack of openness from young people. (Survey participant)

Several interview participants also indicated that although up-to-date information was often held in case files, data held in central systems were often dated or inaccurate. In many TCAC services the technology was available to transfer data from case files to centralised databases but there was not a culture or awareness among staff of the importance and benefits of doing this. This was being addressed by a number of authorities, one of which had an IT-literate member of staff who was beginning to train other members of staff to connect case file information to the central system.

Providing data to Scottish Government

National returns to Scottish Government are an annual requirement and were duly prioritised by TCAC services. However, participants voiced a number of concerns about returns; these fell into two categories:

- Dissatisfaction with the quality and utility of the data collected
- Dissatisfaction with the data items collected.

Utility and quality

A number of participants indicated that the data that needed to be collected were not in a format that was particularly useful for authorities:

> *[CLAS] data is often not used in a meaningful way so is of little importance to many local authorities at aggregate level. (Interview participant)*

Others felt that the Scottish Government should analyse and use CLAS data to identify information to improve outcomes for care leavers:

> *Although we report on the CLAS statistics, there has not been any analysis, inspection or consequences in relation to the information provided to the Scottish Government, when they continue to evidence poor outcomes for young people leaving care. (Survey participant)*

It was further acknowledged that inconsistencies in local authority definitions and interpretations of data that were reported to the Scottish Government made results difficult to interpret:

> *It is difficult to interpret the national data supplied via the Scottish Government's annual CLAS returns as in my experience each local authority has a different interpretation of what information they are actually being asked to provide returns on. The guidance notes are somewhat convoluted and the Scottish Government only publishes data based upon young people who are involved with TCAC services.*

This included, as we saw earlier, different reporting mechanisms for the number of care leavers who are eligible for TCAC services:

> *The interpretation of what constitutes a 'care leaver' is another contentious area, as personally I am aware that some local authorities do not provide a service to those who were previously looked after at home, however the statistical data does not reflect this. (Survey participant)*

Participants suggested that partnership working with care leavers was not adequately represented in CLAS data, as there is no mechanism for recording care leavers who receive support from services other than throughcare and aftercare teams:

> *We work in partnership with other agencies who hold valid, current information on care leavers (e.g. SDS, accommodation providers) however if the young person is not working with TCAC*

then they are recorded as not known, whereas we do often know their circumstances. This can skew the data returns significantly. (Survey participant)

It was therefore felt that CLAS data does not reflect the breadth of services and organisations that care leavers are involved with, missing opportunities to consider the variation in intensity and type of service use:

These figures will not properly represent the Throughcare and Aftercare work that is carried out as it is carried out by a range of people that includes social workers, residential workers and support workers via commissioned services who all record their own data. (Survey participant)

Dissatisfaction with the data points collected
A further criticism of CLAS data was its inability to represent key care leaver issues and therefore to inform policy and practice:

The CLAS return is only a snapshot and needs to be adapted to provide meaningful, accurate information for the Scottish Government. This is required for rational, evidenced based policy and planning decisions. (Survey participant)

Current national data collection was thought to focus on care leaver *'outputs' rather than 'outcomes'*. This had two potential consequences for care leavers: firstly their development was not tracked and achievements went unrecognised and secondly there was a risk that staff would focus on the measured housing and employment outputs at the expense of personal and social skills development:

Because softer outcomes are not monitored, all support workers may not focus on developing these skills with young people. Young people are also unaware of the progression they have made and this is a lost opportunity as it could be used to help motivate them to continue to develop… (Interview participant)

Participants were generally keen that data collection should be improved; many believing that a root and branch review was required:

It would be helpful if useful criteria could be agreed and applied across the 32 local authorities, it is my view that CLAS returns do not accurately reflect/capture experiences of young people leaving care in Scotland … . (Survey participant)

Some of the particular areas that participants identified as problematic are summarised below:

- Episodes of homelessness after leaving care are not fully recorded
- Education/training/employment is not recorded effectively
- Disability figures are improbably low

- Learning disability, autism spectrum and emotional behaviour difficulties are under reported or not recorded
- Bank, passport identification etc. should be monitored
- Pregnancy and parenthood is not effectively monitored
- There is a need for 'hard data' and softer, personalised outcomes measures.

Justifications for introducing new data collection items centred round service development and delivery, as in the case of pregnancy and parenthood statistics and ensuring that care leavers were in a position to be able to attain identification documents and other services, such as bank accounts and passports:

Pregnancy rates aren't requested in the CLAS returns yet in my authority they make up [a high number] of the under 19 stats. We know these young women's children will all too often become the next looked after generation but we don't even report on the numbers affected. (Interview participant)

Assessment, measuring and recording outcomes

Most authorities used Pathways planning as the main method of assessment to inform understanding of care leaver needs and development; however the Pathways plan assessment was frequently amended by local authorities, for example, to '*make it bit more friendly and less cumbersome' (Survey participant).* A number of authorities had developed their own assessments or used GIRFEC either alongside or instead of Pathways planning. One participant questioned the value of the Pathways assessment and thought that it was viewed as an unhelpful tool by the TCAC sector:

I think probably universally nobody wants the pathway plan….we shouldn't waste so much time on the document …but (concentrate) on the quality of interventions. (Interview participant)

TCAC staff generally felt they had a good understanding, through assessment and case notes, of individual care leavers' outcomes, with smaller authorities more likely to report that they had a good understanding for most, or all, care leavers. Participants, however, noted that appropriate outcomes tools for care leavers were not used or did not exist. A need was therefore expressed by many to develop better outcomes measures and tools, which would have the following benefits:

- Providing evidence of care leaver development over time
- Informing service development and organisational target setting
- Enabling annual (internal) and inter-authority comparisons.

Challenges and opportunities for the sector

Participants highlighted a number of challenging areas for the sector. Some of these are current; some were anticipated for the future. Challenges by their nature were complex

with no easy answer. Below we summarise many of these challenges, tackling first those which were mentioned most frequently:

- Future financial constraints

Participants were concerned that over the next few years the full impact of economic recession and austerity measures would result in significant challenges in ensuring services for care leavers could be retained. There would be *'increased pressure on resources and uncertainties over the level of funding for commissioned services'* (Survey participant). Concerns included the potential need to reduce staff members. It was therefore imperative to ensure that senior managers had a realistic understanding of the needs of care leavers.

- Partnership working

Challenges in relation to partnership working were connected to the capacity of partner organisations to provide services and the recognition that many were also facing budget constraints. Again it was felt imperative that these partners develop a real understanding and interest in providing services to care leavers. Key partner organisations mentioned in this context included Housing, the Department for Work and Pensions, Health and Mental Health Services, Education Departments and potential employers.

- Suitable accommodation

Sourcing suitable accommodation for care leavers posed particular challenges for authorities. Areas of particular difficulty included a lack of one-bedroom properties for care leavers, insufficient emergency accommodation for young people in crisis and the need to develop better supported accommodation and group living situations for care leavers, particularly those who had previously lived in residential care.

- Lack of existing resource

Available services and existing financial arrangements did not always stretch to meet existing levels of need; TCAC services were often unable to meet their statutory duties towards care leavers. This included not being able to provide services to those who were looked after at home and those who were in kinship care. There were frequently no resources to develop new services that TCAC staff felt would be beneficial, for example, group work or out-of-hours support.

- Legislative changes

Impending changes included Welfare Reform, Homelessness Legislation, Children's Hearing Act and Children and Young People Bill. These legislative changes were of concern to participants. In particular, dealing with the impact of welfare reform, including impact on accommodation was a key concern. Similarly, the future extension of services up to the age of 25, while welcomed, was a particular concern.

- Opportunities for employment and education

Participants frequently reported that there were too few opportunities for employment and education for care leavers.

Other challenging areas included data collection and monitoring (discussed previously), competing agendas (often including restructuring) within local authorities and ensuring that service reviews and monitoring and evaluation activities did not have an impact on case work with care leavers:

> *Where services are being prioritised, it is important for us to remain aware that the priorities of other agencies and services are not always likely to match the expressed needs of Throughcare services or young people. (Survey participant)*

Some TCAC services and local authorities had plans in place to address the challenges they faced, but these were often at an early stage; they included service reviews and discussions with other services in the authority. Steps to address change were being implemented in some areas, such as delivery of briefings and information sessions for workers, work undertaken to recruit supported carers, streamlining service provision and updating teams on changes to welfare and homelessness. Other authorities were reported to have 'no real plans' at this stage.

A number of the challenges were portrayed as potential opportunities which could lead to improved outcomes if appropriately supported and resourced. For example:

- Alternate funding streams such as Life Changes Trust and Big Lottery
- Young people becoming more involved with service improvements
- Development of specific services e.g. peer mentoring, accommodation and supported carers
- Raising the age of support to 25
- Developing arrangements with housing
- Partnership working to share resources
- Opportunities to become more innovative about how to support care leavers
- (In a few authorities) opportunity to recruit new staff.

Discussion of key messages

Defining 'engagement'

It is clear that care leavers require support over an extended period of time and that enabling re-entry to support will be necessary. Much of the work to support this vulnerable group at this key transition is labour and time intensive. It was found that the average length of time young people are engaged with services varies considerably between local authorities.

The research also highlighted that local authorities adopt a variety of approaches when describing what is meant by 'engagement' of young people. Some young people are counted as being 'engaged' when the responsible authority sends a text message; others when the young person is in receipt of intensive sustained support.

A number of local authorities described young people as being engaged with services even when making intermittent use of a duty-worker system. This was rationalised by some authorities as being a 'person-centred' approach, accepting that it was a young person's right or choice not to engage with services, but fluctuations in engagement were also said to be driven by various crises in young people's lives.

This creates a tension: on the one hand participants were strongly in favour of being flexible, person-centred and allowing engagement to be dictated by young people, on the other, they were strongly in favour of being proactive in making contact and sustaining relationships in order to avoid crises. At face value this would seem to be a contradiction since an approach which was more 'laissez-faire' would be inconsistent with relationship-based practice and the need for consistent adult and professional relationships. It is possible that both of these tactics were used, depending on the situation or on the young person involved; what is effective for some may not work well for others. However, there is clearly a danger that in defining young people as 'engaged' even when contact is sporadic, services may validate low levels of involvement and support which might otherwise have been attributed to issues such as staffing, capacity or less effective service delivery. This issue would be best examined from the perspective of the young person.

Variability of groups served by TCAC

The picture across Scotland is patchy; different services and supports are available to young people in different areas and there are significant numbers of eligible young people who cannot currently receive a service.

Some local authorities offer support to all eligible young people, whether looked after at home or away from home. Other local authorities prioritise young people placed in residential houses or external placements and do not offer services to young people looked after at home, regardless of need or vulnerability. This is primarily attributed to resource and capacity issues where services are rationed with reference to interpretations of duty and legislative thresholds rather than on need or vulnerability.

Data collection and Monitoring of Outcomes

A major issue and concern across the sector was the difficulty of accessing and collating accurate data in respect of care leavers. There is no consistent recording of what practitioners and operational managers would describe as 'meaningful data'. Inconsistent systems and processes result in difficulties aggregating or comparing data. There is little evidence that young people's outcomes are successfully recorded.

There were robust views questioning the value and process of data returns to Scottish Government and suggestions that the wrong questions were being asked at the wrong time. The data return only provides a snapshot and there were strong views that this needs to be adapted to provide meaningful and accurate information.

It was acknowledged that better quality data would help inform service planning and service improvement as well as supporting measures to improve practice in terms of consistency of care planning and reviewing in relation to transitions.

Service structures and restructuring

The service structure and delivery of services across the local authorities is another area where there is no consistent approach to fundamental principles of prioritisation or service delivery. Throughcare and Aftercare teams have been greatly affected by the wider restructuring and service redesign which has been a feature of many local authorities. This has resulted in many teams and specialists being variously reorganised, amalgamated, de-centralised and disaggregated. We found limited evidence that changes at this level were primarily intended to improve outcomes for looked after young people and care leavers.

In some cases changes had an impact on staffing numbers and service stability which is likely to cause disruption to consistent relationships with looked after young people and care leavers.

There was a feeling that there was a lack of priority given to care leavers in many authorities. With notable exceptions, many local authorities seemed unable or reluctant to further develop TCAC service provision, in terms either of capacity or specialist knowledge and skills. Some authorities seemed to be gradually reducing or disbanding TCAC teams. This seems surprising given the potential implications of the forthcoming Children and Young People Bill.

Consideration should perhaps be given to mandatory impact assessments ahead of any plans to re-structure or re-design, to meaningfully reflect on and mitigate any negative impact on looked after young people and care leavers. This should involve direct consultation with care leavers to ascertain and incorporate their views.

Corporate parenting and leadership

Around two-thirds of authorities raised corporate parenting as an important and relevant factor for TCAC services. Participants reported inconsistencies in the way this agenda played out in their area. Whilst some felt corporate parenting was quite advanced in

their area, others felt that TCAC teams had to adopt a championing role, repeatedly informing partner agencies and organisations of their duties and the issues that care leavers face. Corporate partners, including some in Children and Families' services, were regarded as having limited understanding of care leaver issues and poor knowledge of care leavers' level of social and emotional development. At times participants were frustrated by their inability to influence or secure real change.

Where corporate parenting at a strategic level was more successful this was attributed to the leadership and senior managers. If key people 'got it', a strong corporate parenting culture could develop which was 'owned' from the top down. Finally, the importance of developing a shared understanding of the meanings of corporate parenting was highlighted, as was the view that young people themselves were often unaware of this agenda.

Pathways Planning
The notion of assessment and planning for young people moving on from care settings can be both complex and resource-intensive and shouldn't be confined to a process which is bureaucratic and meaningless. Many local authorities adapted and improved 'Pathways' materials, finding the original materials cumbersome or unhelpful.

Staying Put
There was universal support for the concept and practice of 'Staying Put', i.e. the need for extended transitions into adulthood and the need for ongoing, holistic, person-centred emotional and practical support. Participants also recognised the fundamental impact of young people moving on too early before they were ready, particularly where there was no possibility of return or second chance and the impact this can have on their lives. Despite this level of support, participants often gave a note of caution in relation to the impact that this agenda would have on services, especially given the reports that many authorities were already failing to fulfil their full range of responsibilities and of significant staffing and resource issues. For example, front line staff requests for placements to be maintained were already being questioned because of budget pressures. These discussions and justifications themselves used time resources which were needed to work with young people.

Conclusions
With the recent passage of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill through the Scottish Parliament, throughcare and aftercare services are prominently positioned. They are increasingly evident in policy and practice debates and in media reports and public discussion. These conversations reflect a clear desire to improve outcomes for care leavers. This study is therefore timely and provides evidence both to inform the debate and provide a baseline against which future action can be monitored. The research offers a detailed picture of TCAC provision across Scotland from the perspective of local authority TCAC leaders. Without exception, these participants exhibited knowledge, professionalism, insight and an admirable commitment to care leavers. In many instances they described positive practice which occurred in spite of difficulties in the cultures, systems and structures within which staff operate.

This report highlights many areas where practice is strong and dimensions where provision is more problematic. In terms of TCAC services, we found that some authorities formally targeted services only to the groups that they felt they had the highest level of duty to serve, effectively this excluded other groups of care leavers. Despite this, there was some evidence that support was being provided flexibly, such that if a young person presented needs which were deemed to be sufficient they may receive a level of support. However, as many eligible young people were reported to be unaware of their entitlement, belonging to a group other than those which were actively targeted would generally mean that a service was not requested or received. This is troubling given that all groups of care leavers face many challenges and, as a group, experience poor outcomes across many domains.

We found diverse service structures and different models of delivery across Scotland; these had primarily evolved in response to local organisational contexts and, to an extent, in response to analyses of local needs and the necessities of local geography. In addition services in many authorities were responding to recent, ongoing or impending, organisational reconfiguration. Some changes at the local level were extremely positive and resulted in better engagement of young people, opportunities to innovate, additional staffing and improved partnership working. However, for most, including some authorities with positive service improvements and better engagement, resourcing was a consistent constraint and challenge and there was a recognition that in some cases need was going unmet. The future extension to eligibility to older young people was widely welcomed but raised further concern in respect of resourcing.

In respect of corporate parenting we found mixed results, with examples that highlighted systems and structures which promoted a genuine and universal sense of corporate responsibility. Equally we heard about examples where departments and/or senior managers were said to be unaware of, or unwilling to prioritise, their responsibilities towards care leavers.

We also found troubling differences in the way in which data about services were monitored, recorded and reported. Key criteria were defined in different ways and other potentially important data were not collected, collated or used effectively. This had a twin effect, on the one hand reducing the availability or impact of services for some young people and, on the other hand, reducing the validity and usefulness of data at local and national levels.

As with any study, this research has strengths and limitations. Strengths include the very high response rate, the richness and detail of the data provided and the mixed method approach. Limitations include the fact that we were only able to explore these matters from the local authority TCAC leaders' perspective. Other voices such the wider corporate family (including housing, health and education services), third and independent sector providers and local and national legislators may provide additional information. Most critically future research should identify the perspective of the users

and potential users of TCAC services; these young people and their families have a clear right to comment and be involved in how services are developed and delivered to them.

The study has covered many areas; many points arise from it. In a report such as this, we are naturally restricted in the amount of detail and coverage we can give. We therefore intend to produce a number of additional follow-up briefings which look in detail at specific areas. We also plan a number of dissemination activities such as workshops, seminars and podcasts.

We believe that for research to have impact it must be interactive. It is important that the 'audience' is able to identify what is most useful and consider how this may be re-applied in the real world. To help stimulate this process, we have identified a number of 'points for reflection' and present these in Appendix 4. These arise directly or indirectly from the research findings and whilst they are necessarily selective, they provide coverage of a wide range of areas. We invite readers to use these questions to initiate discussions within their own work areas or with partners and we would be keen to hear about any conclusions or actions arising from these interactions. Finally we encourage observations, comments and feedback on this study and invite any reader who wishes to do so, to use the contact details provided (see front cover).

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Appendices

Appendix 1. TCAC Service Structure Typologies

TCAC Service Structures (Stein 2012)
1. A non-specialist service where responsibility for delivering a service rests primarily with field social workers
2. A centrally organised specialist service consisting of a centrally organised team of throughcare workers providing an authority-wide service, primarily to care leavers
3. A looked after adolescents team which acquired statutory responsibility for the young person and, in the main, worked with young people from the age of 15 upwards (not only care leavers).
4. A dispersed specialist service where individualised throughcare workers are attached to area-based fieldwork teams
5. A specialist dual service where the young person is referred to the specialist team but with statutory responsibility being retained by the locality social worker
6. A centrally organised integrated service that aims to provide an integrated service to a wider range of vulnerable young people 'in need'

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Appendix 2. Percentage of respondents indicating core service provision

	TCAC Service	Other Statutory	Commissioned
Housing support	80.8	69.2	57.7
P&E Casework	100	42.3	50
Skills training	80.8	42.3	53.8
Dedicated EET support	53.8	80.8	42.3
Accommodation	42.3	80.8	46.2
Dedicated health support	30.8	76.9	19.2
S&E Groupwork	46.2	38.5	30.8
Drop-in support	65.4	19.2	23.1
Dedicated duty	46.2	23.1	23.1
Other	23.1	3.8	3.8

Appendix 3. Methods used to consult with care leavers

Service Development Opportunities	Purpose and Methods
Individual Service Feedback (Very Common)	Care leavers provided feedback about the specific service they received from TCAC and sometimes other, services.

Information was commonly collected via questionnaires (every 6 months or annually) and pathway assessments (including use of Viewpoint, Have Your Say, Pathway Views and Listen to Us). Existing groups or clubs (for care leavers or care leavers and looked after children), exit interviews and post-placement forms, information gathered from service comments and complaints leaflets and questionnaires distributed by other service providers were other methods used to gather care leaver views about services.

Young people's views are continuously sought, the young person's support plan has a specific section on suggestion and complaints and young people are encouraged to contribute to the development of the service each time they complete/review their plan. (Survey participant)

Feedback requested at this level varied. Some authorities asked for feedback about reviews, others asked for feedback about groups and activities, whilst others asked for feedback about supported carer placements. |
| Consultations (Common) | Care leavers provided views on specific issues that were likely to affect them, such as 'financial support, accommodation, health and training/employment support' 'the new Bill, housing and accommodation' (survey participants).

Consultations could be run by TCAC services or external organisations, such as the Care Inspectorate and took a number of forms including tailored events, questionnaires and focus groups. Consultations with care leavers were sometimes part of a wider organisational process which gathered staff and partner agency perspectives. |

	Currently a stakeholder consultation is taking place to consider any service developments that might be considered. Young people have already had their views acknowledged. Two focus groups of partner agencies are due to be held, questionnaires have been sent out and staffs' views are being sought. (Survey participant)
Campaign or Rights Groups (Common)	Campaign and rights groups aimed to inform individuals (including care leavers and staff) about the rights of care leavers and the responsibilities organisations had towards them. Groups were often but not always run by external organisations such as Who Cares? Scotland or Children's Rights Services. Groups could be local or national.
Events (Common)	Events often focused on the corporate parenting agenda, consultation exercises or providing care leavers with relevant information about services available to them. Not all authorities held care leaver events and timeframes varied in those who did with events held 6-monthly, annually or as one-off events. Events could be exclusively for care leavers, such as care leaver conferences, or could have a wider agenda such as corporate parenting days, launches and seminars which involved partner agencies, elected members, other council bodies and managers or heads of service. A number of these events took place during National Care Leavers Week (October each year) as an opportunity to *'celebrate National Care Leavers week – full active and vibrant participation from YP, Q&A session with Managers, video Diary, Stall Holders and Performance'* (Survey participant).
Corporate Parenting Boards / Discussions with Senior Council Staff and Councillors (Relatively Common)	Care leavers were involved in corporate parenting meetings and / or discussions with social work directors and local service providers, including accommodation providers, to promote services and awareness of care leavers.

	Users, or past users, of [TCAC services] have sat on the Corporate Parenting Strategic Group and this is an ongoing opportunity for service users to represent views and contribute to authority strategic development. (Survey participant)
Service Review Days (Less frequent)	Service reviews in two authorities were used in a potentially in-depth, interactive manner with staff and care leavers getting together to discuss service development. Service reviews could be TCAC-specific or focused on children and families' services more generally. *On occasions special development days are arranged to enable young people and staff to contribute their views about developing the service.* (Survey participant)
Staff Recruitment and Commissioning Services (Less common)	Care leavers were involved in interview and selection processes to inform decisions about which staff or services would best meet their needs. Care leavers were on occasion asked to inform bids or grants for services.
Staff Training (Less common)	In at least 3 local authorities care leavers were involved in professional training events to increase awareness of care leaver issues. *We also encourage and support young people to participate in training e.g. children's hearing members, multi-agency audiences* (Survey participant)
Peer Mentoring (Less common although there are plans to develop this across a number of authorities)	Peer mentoring schemes, offering support to newer care leavers, gave care leavers acting as mentors an *opportunity to contribute [to] service delivery and the development of the service: peer mentoring will be developed in conjunction with care leavers.* (Survey participant)
Filmmaking (Less common)	Making and publishing DVDs was used in a positive way to promote care leavers' experiences of leaving care and to give care leavers a voice in future services offered by TCAC staff.

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	Currently we are working with a group of care leavers who are producing a film which will detail their experiences of leaving care and highlight the services they were offered. This will be used to help young people currently in care to prepare for the time they will no longer be looked after. (Survey participant)
Research (Less common)	Service improvements were occasionally informed by research with care leavers in the authority, leading to some significant changes in practice in one authority. *Young people have always been at the centre of service delivery and development in our area and much of what we do is embedded in a piece of research which looked at the experiences of young people who had left our care. The findings fundamentally changed the way we practice in this area. (Survey participant)*
Participation Strategies (**No Care Leaver Involvement Reported**)	Participation strategies were mentioned by a number of authorities. One authority strategy aimed *to promote and embed a genuine participative culture whilst avoiding tokenism*. Other plans stipulated specific tasks and activities that could promote service development, for example, in one authority senior officers and elected members were to be invited to meet with young people to discuss specific concerns. There was no evidence to suggest that care leavers had played a direct role in developing participation strategies.

Appendix 4. Points for Reflection

- What are the local impacts of the 'staying put' agenda and of moves to extend the age of eligibility for TCAC; how will services respond to growing/changing demands for TCAC support?

- What is the optimal balance between specialist provision for care leavers and facilitated access to mainstream/universal services?

- What factors influence the type and levels of contact that care leavers require from TCAC services and how might this change over time for different individuals?

- Do local services reflect the needs of all care leavers, including those from various ethnic backgrounds, those who are disabled, those in a variety of different living circumstances, those who have experienced different types of trauma and those of different ages and genders?

- How can care leavers influence the services provided for them?

- How can corporate parenting be strengthened further, at all levels of responsibility and in all relevant service areas?

- How can the collection, collation and use of data be optimised to improve local service delivery?

- What forms of data collection would ensure that all types of support are effectively captured and recognised and how could (or should) care leavers' use of universal services be identified and monitored?

- Are sufficiently robust and detailed data available in all areas to understand the needs of different equalities groups and how successfully are services being delivered to them?

- Are improvements required to national processes of data collection (e.g. further or different data items, clearer definitions etc.), if so, what process would lead to this improvement?

- What information should Scottish Government publish and how would this be used locally?

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About CELCIS

CELCIS is the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland. Together with partners, we are working to improve the lives of all looked after children in Scotland. We do so by providing a focal point for the sharing of knowledge and the development of best practice, by providing a wide range of services to improve the skills of those working with looked after children, and by placing the interests of children at the heart of our work.

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