

## Guidance for considering care experience in Equality Impact Assessments



If you have any feedback on this document or require it in an alternative format please contact The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team at Cambridgeshire County Council: [EDI.Team@Cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:EDI.Team@Cambridgeshire.gov.uk)

## Contents

Introduction .....	3
Purpose of this guide .....	3
Background .....	3
What do we mean by “care experience”? .....	5
Understanding the implications of care experience .....	5
The EIA process: guiding assessments .....	6
Considering care experienced individuals in your EIA .....	9
Engagement and monitoring characteristics .....	9
Data sources .....	10
Assessing the potential impact on policies and/or services on care-experienced individuals .....	11
Proposed examples of impact in policy .....	12
Case study: example of considering care-experience in an EIA .....	17
Additional considerations.....	17
Training or workshops .....	18
Children and Young People’s Rights and Entitlements .....	18
Advocacy (Statutory Entitlement) .....	19
Independent Visitor(s) (Statutory Entitlement) .....	20
Continuous learning and continual improvement and measuring impact.....	20
Additional resources, links and literature .....	21
Safety Net Service .....	21

## Introduction

This guidance has been co-produced by Cambridgeshire County Council and Care Leaver Offer to support public bodies to consider care experience in their own Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) processes.

This guidance has arisen following an Independent Review of Children's Social Care headed by Josh McCallister published in May 2022 which had a final report and recommendations that included:

“Government should make care experience a protected characteristic” and  
“New legislation should be passed which broadens corporate parenting responsibilities across a wider set of public bodies and organisations.”

As a result, many local authorities have passed a motion to treat ‘care experience’ as a protected characteristic which means employers, businesses, public services, and policy makers put in place policies and programmes which promote better outcomes for care experienced people.

## Purpose of this guide

This guidance supports public authorities to embed ‘care experience’ into their Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) processes and provides information to inform local guidance to support employees to consider the differential impact of policy decisions on care-experienced individuals.

This guidance will:

- Provide a definition of care experience for practitioners.
- Outline why it is important to consider care experienced individuals in EIAs.
- Provide a foundation to support local authorities to explore how they can strengthen their existing EIA processes to include care experience and guide their employees to consider care experience in their EIAs.
- Explore the implications of care experience and provide real examples of the differential impact of policy decisions on care experienced individuals.
- Explore why it is important to engage with care experienced individuals to inform an EIA.
- Provide some good practice examples/case studies.

This guidance starts by providing information on the process of conducting EIAs to help inform your processes and guidance to staff. It provides the foundational structure for us to explore how care experienced individuals, alongside the other protected characteristics, are considered throughout the process.

## Background

The Public Sector Equality Duty (the Duty), set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, requires public authorities to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. This involves, in particular, having due regard to the need to:
  - Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
  - Take steps to meet the needs of people with certain protected characteristics where these are different from the needs of other people.
  - Encourage people with certain protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
  - This means tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between people from different groups and communities.

The protected characteristics are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race (includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality)
- religion or belief (this includes lack of belief)
- sex
- sexual orientation

The Duty isn't prescriptive about what form this analysis should take, but for consistency and transparency, Equality Impact Assessments are a commonly used tool. Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) are an anticipatory process that supports local authorities to predict possible issues and take appropriate action such as removing or mitigating any negative impacts, where possible, and maximising any potential for positive impact. They are a tool to systematically assess the likely or actual effects of policies, practices, or decisions on different groups, particularly on those with protected characteristics. EIAs operate as a mechanism to aid the practitioner or policy maker to look through the heart and mind of those with protected characteristics to reduce stigma, discrimination and provide equity and equality for those accessing their services.

Adding care experience as an additional category in your EIA process will ensure the unique experiences and needs of care experienced individuals are considered at policy level. By adding this into your processes, you can explore and identify any potential implications of decisions on this group, ensuring that the actions proposed do not inadvertently discriminate against care experienced individuals and promote informed, equitable decision-making. To do this, practitioners will need support from their organisation to think through the potential impacts of their policy/project/service change on care experienced individuals and how they can consider care-experienced individuals in their consultation.

## What do we mean by “care experience”?

In your guidance, it is important to define care experience:

"Care experience" refers to the experiences of individuals who spent part of their childhood in the care system due to situations beyond their control. These individuals can face both direct and indirect discrimination throughout their lives.

The term “care experience” is a description of a definition in law, it includes anyone that had the state as its corporate parent by virtue of a care order in accordance with the Children Act 1989 and amendments.

A “care leaver” is defined in law as someone over the age of 16 who has been in the care of the local authority and/or Health and Social Care Trust for a period of at least 13 weeks or more. This definition may present additional barriers for children and young people to access support due to not having a ‘typical’ journey throughout their time in the care system. As such, the less restrictive ‘care experience’ definition is preferred which does not exclude individuals based on placement type and duration of time in care.

## Understanding the implications of care experience

Care-experienced individuals are disadvantaged due to biases against them. When creating guidance for your practitioners, it is important to detail the potential long-term effects and challenges care experience can have on individuals' lives. This could include mental health issues, social stigmas, financial struggles, and more.

Table 1 provides examples on the disadvantages care experienced people face to use in your guidance.

**Table 1: Implications of care experience**

Theme	Information
<b>Lack of trust</b>	Care experienced individuals may have a deep-rooted mistrust in systems or institutions, born out of their experiences with the care system. This could result in hesitancy or difficulty in seeking out and accessing necessary services, leading to delays in receiving important support or care.
<b>Social networks</b>	Social networks often play a vital role in an individual's ability to access services or support. They can provide valuable information, resources, and emotional support. Care experienced individuals might lack these networks due to broken familial relationships or frequent relocations. This can make navigating systems more challenging and isolating.
<b>Family guidance</b>	Individuals who have grown up in care often lack the family guidance and positive adult role models that many take for granted. This could be advice on filling out forms, understanding services available to them, or having the support of a family member when facing an intimidating process. The absence of this support can hinder their ability to access and navigate services.

Theme	Information
<b>Digital connectivity</b>	In our increasingly digital world, access to technology and the internet is crucial for accessing many services. Care experienced individuals might face digital exclusion due to lack of financial resources or guidance on how to use digital tools. This can create additional barriers to accessing services, opportunities, and information.
<b>Social mobility</b>	Care experienced individuals can face significant challenges when it comes to social mobility. The hurdles they encounter in education, employment, housing, and other key areas can limit their ability to advance socially and economically. This lack of social mobility can create a vicious cycle that hinders access to services and opportunities.
<b>Access to public transport</b>	Mobility is a key factor in being able to access services. Limited access to reliable and affordable public transport can greatly impede the ability of care-experienced individuals to reach physical service locations. This barrier can be compounded if they are in a situation where they are frequently moved between placements or are in a rural area with limited transport options.
<b>Access to housing</b>	Care experienced individuals aged 18, 19 and 20 have automatic priority to housing – provided by their local authority – akin to when they were 16 or 17 years old. However, when searching for accommodation out-of-area, particularly for those progressing to university, students who are care leavers or estranged from their families often struggle to find a suitable rent guarantor, which has become a standard ask from private landlords housing students. Without a guarantor or an upfront payment of 6 to 12 months of rent to secure accommodation, many care experienced young people will be unable to confirm their accommodation. For students, this may lead to them dropping out of university.

Each of these factors can contribute to the marginalisation of care-experienced individuals, making it more difficult for them to access and benefit from services that are crucial to their well-being and development. Understanding these implications is critical to ensuring the EIA process effectively considers the unique challenges faced by those with care experience.

### The EIA process: guiding assessments

A clear and comprehensive EIA template can provide a consistent approach across all services, helping to ensure that all relevant factors are considered. It can also provide clarity and guidance for practitioners, making the process more efficient and effective. EIAs can be done both when practice or service change taking place, or an existing practice is being reviewed.

“Practice or service change” covers a range of topics – including the drafting, modification or review of:

- Internal processes (e.g. recruitment, disciplinary, grievance, procurement, etc)
- Policies
- Strategies
- Functions
- Services
- Projects
- Events
- Staff restructures
- Financial decisions (e.g., departmental budget cuts, procurement decisions, etc)
- Transformational change
- Any other activity that impacts people

If you are unsure if there will be an impact on equalities, an EIA screening tool is sometimes used as an initial tool to help practitioners decide whether an EIA is required. An initial screening is not an EIA and therefore if challenged would not stand in a judicial review. If you know that an EIA is required, then you do not need to complete a screening.

If an EIA is required, Figure 1 identifies the key stages of the process.

<b>Identify policy/service change</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognise when a significant policy or service change, particularly in a high impact area, necessitates an EIA. Outlining the objectives of the practice or service change, as well as the current or expected outcomes to give context to your project and the EIA.</li> </ul>
<b>Evidence and consultation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find and analyse the relevant equality information by screening and collecting data from all available sources. Engage with affected groups, specifically care experienced individuals to understand their needs, perspectives and potential impact of the proposed change.</li> <li>• In addition to general questions applicable to all protected groups, it's important to include considerations specifically tailored to care experienced individuals. These considerations recognise the unique experiences and challenges faced by this group, ensuring they are adequately addressed in assessments.</li> </ul>
<b>Analysis</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on the data gathered and consultation feedback, analyse the potential impacts of the change. Consider both indirect and direct discrimination.</li> </ul>
<b>Mitigation</b>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If negative impacts are identified, devise strategies to mitigate these effects and in case that is not possible, state why and assess how the impact will be monitored and managed.</li> </ul>
<b>Implementation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement the proposed change along with the mitigation strategies. This could be written in an action plan document.</li> </ul>
<b>Monitoring and review</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor the effects of the change and review the impact on different groups. Adjust strategy as necessary based on the findings.</li> </ul>

Figure 1 The EIA Process

Whilst following these key steps, there are some key principles to consider when conducting EIAs:

1. An EIA must be started at the beginning of a practice and/or service change, **NOT** at the end. They are supposed to continue alongside the process of change, informing it throughout each development and decision.
2. In addition to the nine protected characteristics and care experience, you may also find it useful to take into consideration the needs of other communities or groups of people currently not covered by the Equality Act 2010, such as: people living in rural isolation, single parents, low-income earners, migrants, people in the armed forces, people who are homeless or have experienced homelessness, people experiencing health inequalities, or any other groups experiencing disadvantage and barriers to access. Consider discrimination and disadvantage arising from multiple identities intersecting (see intersectionality section below).
3. With EIAs, decisions are based on evidence with clear reasoning, not our intuitions and assumptions. Therefore, without good evidence, good EIAs are difficult to achieve.
4. The scope of a good EIA needs to be in line with the scope of the project it is being conducted for.
5. EIAs are not about treating everyone the same but identifying the specific needs of different groups.
6. EIAs are designed to **both** promote positive impacts, as well as to reduce or remove negative impacts.
7. The objective of an EIA is not to complete a specific form or template, but to understand the effects of a policy on equality and any actions needed as a result.
8. When integrated well, EIAs improve decision-making and don't imply an unnecessary additional activity.
9. Remember to evaluate the effectiveness of the existing approach to EIAs, and consider whether there are any lessons to be fed back into your organisation's practice.

You should create a visual guide, such as a flow chart or a checklist. This could be helpful for practitioners to understand and remember the process of conducting an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) that includes care experienced individuals.



This guidance will now focus on how practitioners can ensure care experience is considered throughout the EIA process, including during consultation and engagement.

## Considering care experienced individuals in your EIA

### Engagement and monitoring characteristics

**Good practice:** A critical part of an EIA is evidence and consultation, which should be reviewed throughout a project. Local authorities should regularly research and evaluate their services and that of their partners' demographics. By identifying the proportion of care experienced individuals who access their services, authorities can gain a more accurate understanding of the reach and impact of their initiatives and that of their partners. Higher rates of care-experienced individuals within a service may indicate a particular relevance or need; conversely, lower rates may suggest accessibility issues or gaps in service provision.

**Example:** Certain crisis intervention services, such as homelessness or anti-social behaviour interventions, are likely to have a disproportionate number of care experienced individuals. Recognising this overrepresentation is crucial, but it's only the first step. Local authorities should also seek to understand why this overrepresentation occurs by looking at the root causes of these issues.

Are there gaps in social or mental health support leading to anti-social behaviour? Is it due to a lack of stable housing for care leavers? A lack of advocacy? A prevalence of coercion? domestic violence? County Lines or manipulation? Are eviction policies of social housing providers appropriate?

Understanding these issues can help authorities tailor their services to address the causes rather than just treating the effects.

Gaining insights from individuals with first-hand experience of the care system is critical for developing good equality impact assessments, leading to equitable policies and services. Understanding the needs and experiences of care experienced individuals leads to more effective, tailored interventions and greater user satisfaction.

Engaging care experienced individuals in the policy and service development process can be highly beneficial. It's crucial that authorities look beyond their services to focus on where the referrals come from and are those policies taking account of the care experience. Here are some suggestions for how to facilitate this engagement:

1. **Establish a Care Experienced Advisory Group** - A group comprised of all care experienced individuals (children currently living in care, care leavers and adults who are care experienced) can provide valuable input into policy decisions and service development. This group should be promoted internally and externally, ensuring that external organisations can access and approach the group for engagement. Advisory group members should be adequately compensated.

### Question suggestion:

Care experience' refer to the experiences of individuals who spent part of their childhood in the care system due to situations beyond their control. It is anyone with any experience of care, no matter how short and no matter what age. Are you care experienced?

A. Yes

B. No

2. **Utilise surveys and interviews** - Regular surveys and interviews can help collect in-depth information about the needs and experiences of care experienced individuals. At minimum, this should include auditing your services and encouraging partners to do the same so that you understand why, when and how care experienced people are accessing your services. A good practice question to include in your survey/staff HR system for care experience:
3. **Host focus groups** - Focus groups can facilitate discussion and yield rich insights into the needs and preferences of care experienced individuals. These should also be used to raise awareness internally across the council and externally with partners about the potential and strengths of care experienced people.
4. **Promote co-production** - Encourage and involve care experienced individuals to participate in co-producing services provided by the local authority. This could involve them in evaluating services or developing resources.
5. **Intersectionality** - Intersectionality is a concept that describes the ways in which systems of inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class and other forms of discrimination "intersect" to create unique dynamics and effects. For example, a person may experience racism and sexism collectively or individually at different times and in different environments.

By incorporating these strategies, local authorities can ensure that the voices and experiences of care experienced individuals are heard and incorporated into decision-making, leading to better, more equitable services and outcomes.

### Data sources

As shown in Figure 1, evidence is essential for your EIAs. The main sources of data which can help to inform your EIA include:

- Care Leaver Local Offer. Available at: [www.careleaveroffer.co.uk](http://www.careleaveroffer.co.uk)
- Department for Education, GOV UK. Benchmarking data from the children looked after return, including care leavers. Available at: [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)
- Department for Education, GOV UK. Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities in England. Available at: [Explore our](#)

statistics and data – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK ([explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk))

- The National Care Leavers Benchmarking Forum. Available at: [National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum](#)

## Assessing the potential impact on policies and/or services on care-experienced individuals

Assessing the potential impact of policies or services on care experienced individuals is crucial in promoting equality and mitigating any potential adverse effects. To facilitate this process, it is beneficial for local authorities to provide specific considerations for practitioners to use when completing EIAs. Here are some example considerations that could be included:

- **Living situation:** Does the policy or service consider the often-unstable living situations of care experienced individuals? How can it better cater to those who may frequently move or lack a fixed address?
- **Access to support networks:** Does the policy or service recognise that care experienced individuals may lack traditional family support networks? How can it compensate for this and provide additional support where needed?
- **Financial considerations:** Does the policy or service acknowledge that care experienced individuals may face financial struggles, and perhaps lack family financial support that other young people might have access to?
- **Mental health:** How does the policy or service consider the potential mental health challenges faced by care experienced individuals? Does it provide or connect to relevant support?
- **Educational disruption:** Does the policy or service recognise the potential disruption to education that care experienced individuals may face? How can it support continuity in learning despite changes in care placement?
- **Access to services:** Are there barriers that may hinder care experienced individuals from accessing the service, such as digital connectivity, access to transport, or timing of service provision?
- **Stigma and discrimination:** How does the policy or service mitigate potential stigma or discrimination faced by care experienced individuals?
- **Appropriate adults:** Care experienced individuals may lack the presence of an appropriate adult to provide guidance and support in personal and professional life. Does the policy or service consider this, and how does it ensure the safety and rights of these individuals are protected in their absence?
- **Risk of exploitation:** Care experienced individuals, particularly those who are in unstable situations, may be at a higher risk of coercion, exploitation, or modern-day slavery. How does the policy or service acknowledge this risk, and what measures are in place to prevent, identify, and respond to potential exploitation?
- **Undiagnosed conditions:** Care experienced individuals may have undiagnosed physical or mental health conditions that could impede their ability to access and benefit from services. How does the policy or service consider the potential for such conditions, and how does it ensure services are accessible and responsive to these individuals' needs?

By incorporating these considerations into your guidance, practitioners will be better equipped to assess the potential impact of policies and services on care experienced individuals, ultimately promoting more equitable outcomes.

### Proposed examples of impact in policy

Understanding the differential impact of policy decisions on care experienced individuals is where impact can be seen, providing employees with practical scenarios for them to consider is recommended in your guidance.

Based on the knowledge and considerations identified in this guidance. Table 2 provides some examples of proposed policy changes, how these changes can impact care experienced people and how using this knowledge mitigation can be taken to prevent further disadvantaging care experienced people. These examples will be helpful for practitioners completing EIAs.

Table 2 Key policy considerations

Policy changes proposed	Understanding the unique circumstances of care experienced individuals	What does this mean for policy?
<b>Mental health policy changes</b>	Care experienced individuals are statistically more likely to have diagnosed and undiagnosed mental health conditions, owing to past trauma and the instability they've experienced.	Policy decisions regarding mental health services must consider these realities. For example, practitioners could advocate for policies that ensure care leavers are not easily discharged due to missed appointments, considering their higher likelihood of disengagement. Or they could propose rules that make it easier for care leavers to remain registered with their original GP or dentist even if they move, to ensure continuity of care.
	Care experienced individuals may have a heightened lack of trust in the system due to their past experiences, and hence may take longer to engage with mental health support services.	
	Care experienced individuals may not have an appropriate adult in their lives to provide support, encourage consistent engagement, or navigate the healthcare system with. Consequently, they may miss appointments more frequently, leading to a higher risk of being discharged from services even when their needs are chronic and not adequately addressed.	
	Care leavers' living situations can often be unstable, causing them to move around often. This can lead to them being 'off-rolled' from local	

Policy changes proposed	Understanding the unique circumstances of care experienced individuals	What does this mean for policy?
	health services such as GP surgeries and dentists due to changes in their address.	
<b>Public transport policy</b>	Financial circumstances are often precarious and care experienced individuals can lack the support of a family that can assist with transportation. This places them at a disadvantage compared to their peers who may have family support, fewer financial obligations, and thereby greater access to personal or unlimited public transport.	Local authorities must recognise and advocate these unique challenges and make accommodations accordingly. This might involve extending student travel benefits to care leavers or introducing transportation subsidies for this group. It could also mean re-evaluating penalties to include alternative resolution interventions such as a requirement to meet with a health and wellbeing officer for fare evasion, considering the individual's circumstances.
	<p>When public transport becomes less accessible or more costly, care experienced individuals may face serious challenges. These could range from getting to work or school, to accessing necessary healthcare services, to socialising - all of which are crucial for wellbeing and development.</p> <p>This disparity is further magnified by policies that offer substantial travel discounts to students but exclude care leavers who are not in education but are managing households. Despite being of a similar age, this can cause "travel poverty", where care leavers struggle to afford necessary travel, hindering their access to opportunities and delaying their progression compared to peers.</p> <p>In some cases, the severe constraints faced by care leavers may push them towards fare evasion out of necessity, choosing between basic needs such as food or travel. This not only risks criminalisation but also contributes to further stress, stigma, and exclusion.</p>	

<b>Policy changes proposed</b>	<b>Understanding the unique circumstances of care experienced individuals</b>	<b>What does this mean for policy?</b>
<b>Digital and data access policies</b>	<p>The shift to services moving online, while facilitating greater convenience for many, can inadvertently exacerbate inequalities for care experienced individuals.</p> <p>Unlike their peers, care experienced individuals might not be able to log onto family Wi-Fi networks. They may lack access to essential digital devices such as a laptop or a printer, thereby experiencing digital deprivation. This not only hampers their ability to access online services, but also affects their ability to engage in educational activities, search for jobs, or even stay connected with their social networks.</p> <p>An inability to access or navigate these online platforms could prevent care experienced individuals from acquiring vital information about services, filling out necessary online forms, or accessing emails - activities that many of us take for granted. For instance, the requirement to maintain online Universal Credit (UC) journals could become a burdensome task if individuals lack the necessary digital access or literacy skills. The failure to complete such tasks could result in sanctions that further compound their financial hardship.</p>	<p>Considering these unique challenges, local authorities should consider how digital access policies can be crafted to meet the needs of care experienced individuals. This might involve providing subsidised or free internet access for care leavers, offering programs for digital literacy training, or ensuring access to essential digital devices. Furthermore, it might be necessary to maintain alternative, non-digital pathways for accessing crucial services, to ensure that no one is left behind in the digital transition.</p>

<b>Policy changes proposed</b>	<b>Understanding the unique circumstances of care experienced individuals</b>	<b>What does this mean for policy?</b>
<b>Employment related policies</b>	<p>The introduction of programs to aid unemployed individuals in finding jobs may inadvertently overlook care experienced individuals if not designed thoughtfully. They may need additional support such as job interview training or help overcoming employer biases, which their peers might receive from their families.</p> <p>Families often play a vital role in the job search and career development process for young adults. They provide encouragement during job applications, offer feedback on CVs or interview techniques, and can sometimes leverage their networks to facilitate work experience opportunities. In many cases, they also provide ongoing advice and emotional support, which can be crucial in navigating the uncertainties of early career development.</p> <p>Care experienced individuals often lack familial support structure. As a result, they might not have the same access to work experience opportunities, nor the guidance and encouragement that can make a significant difference in securing employment. This can leave them disadvantaged when entering the job market or seeking career advancement.</p>	<p>When local authorities create employment opportunities internally or work with others through economic development, it's crucial to consider these unique challenges. They should encourage HR to look at how care experienced individuals can be supported to access jobs, training, work experience, and career information within the council itself. This could include initiatives like dedicated job and career fairs for care leavers, mentorship programs within the council, experience days or training sessions on topics such as job descriptions, CV writing, and interview skills specifically designed for care leavers.</p> <p>Moreover, the local authorities should consider providing additional support that care leavers might not typically receive. This could range from providing consistent, constructive feedback on their job performance, to offering emotional support and encouragement during their job search or career development. Rewriting employee benefit schemes to add things such as travel, work wear, IT, driving lessons and free/subsidised short breaks, holidays and activities. Such measures can help ensure that care experienced individuals are not left behind, but instead receive the tailored support they need to thrive in their careers.</p>

<b>Policy changes proposed</b>	<b>Understanding the unique circumstances of care experienced individuals</b>	<b>What does this mean for policy?</b>
<b>Changes to educational support policies</b>	<p>Care experienced individuals often face significant educational challenges due to their unique circumstances. Many frequently move between care placements, resulting in disruptions to their educational continuity and achievement.</p> <p>One key area of consideration for local authorities is the timing of course enrolment at educational institutions. Many institutions have set enrolment periods, which can disadvantage care-experienced individuals who may move into an area mid-term and then must wait until the next intake to begin their studies. While local authorities may not directly control the timing of course enrolments, they could potentially influence these practices by offering additional supports.</p> <p>The repercussions of a young person moving into an area but having to wait for enrolment can be severe. It can lead to feelings of isolation and disengagement from society, which can increase the risk of exploitation. In worst-case scenarios, care experienced individuals may become targets for criminal exploitation, substance misuse, or other negative influences during this waiting period.</p>	<p>To mitigate these potential vulnerabilities, local authorities should consider providing comprehensive support that extends beyond academics. This could involve facilitating access to community and leisure activities, providing mental health support, or offering mentoring programs to help these young people stay engaged and safe while they wait for their education to commence.</p> <p>By proactively addressing these issues, local authorities can help ensure that care-experienced individuals receive the support they need to navigate the educational landscape and progress in their personal and academic development.</p> <p>Local authorities could provide supplementary tutoring services for care experienced individuals to help them catch up academically. This could be especially beneficial for those who have missed the traditional enrolment period. Not only would this support help care experienced individuals to bridge the academic gap, but it may also encourage educational institutions to reconsider their enrolment policies in light of the additional support available.</p>



## Case study: example of considering care-experience in an EIA

The following illustrates the importance and potential impacts of thorough an EIA. Although this case study is fictional, is inspired by real-life situations that care leavers can find themselves in.

### Case study 1

**Issue identified:** Through data and evidence, the local authority noticed that care leavers were overrepresented in homelessness cases due to evictions linked to anti-social behaviour, often associated with involvement in county lines drug dealing. While the housing association bore the immediate costs of eviction, the local authority often found themselves responsible for young people post-eviction.

Further investigation revealed that these young people were often asking casual acquaintances for assistance with basic home maintenance tasks. Unfortunately, some of these acquaintances exploited the care leavers' vulnerability, moving into their properties and involving them in illegal activities.

**Equality Impact Assessment findings:** As part of their duties in preventing and relieving homelessness, the local authority conducted an EIA. It was discovered that housing providers were not sufficiently considering the unique situations and vulnerabilities of care leavers.

**Action:** In response, a 'Repairs and Maintenance Policy' for care leavers was introduced by the local authority. Under this policy, the local authority coordinated with a variety of service providers to ensure basic home maintenance support was available to care leavers, reducing their need to seek assistance from potentially exploitative acquaintances.

**Impact:** This policy change had a dramatic impact. Not only did it significantly reduce the number of evictions among care leavers and subsequent homelessness, but it also led to notable cost savings for the local authority. Previously, the authority had been burdened with substantial costs related to homelessness prevention and relief following evictions.

Furthermore, the policy had additional social benefits. Care leavers felt more supported, leading to improved mental health and wellbeing. Also, the number of care leavers engaging in education and employment increased as they had a more stable housing situation.

Although fictional, this case study demonstrates the potential real-world impact that can result from effective EIAs. By examining the unique needs and challenges of care experienced individuals, local authorities can create policy changes that yield not only social benefits but also significant cost savings.

Additional considerations

## Training or workshops

Alongside developing EIA guidance, developing training and workshops will help practitioners better understand the implications of care experience and learn how to effectively incorporate this category into their EIAs will speed up development and awareness. If you already have EIA training, consider how you can ensure care experienced people are referenced throughout the training.

## Children and Young People's Rights and Entitlements

Every child and young person have certain rights, no matter who they are, where they live or what their situation may be. It is crucial that they are informed of what their rights and entitlements at the earliest opportunity to ensure they know what help they can ask for and identify when they are not being treated properly.

The support young people are entitled to as care leavers depends on multiple different factors, including when they entered care, how long they lived in care and their geographic location. Personal advisors should commit to open and transparent dialogue with the young people they support regarding their entitlements, which should generally include:

- Providing the young person with a personal advisor who can offer advice and support to enable a successful transition from care to independence.
- Keeping in contact with the young person and keeping their Pathway Plan under regular review.
- Providing financial assistance to help with employment, training or education expenses where needed.
- Providing a leaving care grant/setting up home allowance to support in furnishing a first home
- Paying a higher education bursary to support with progression to university.
- Appointing an advocate to the young person in accessing their rights and entitlements

The [Care Leaver Local Offer](#) provides an overview of care leaver entitlements and support across multiple local authorities. This resource is a useful tool in better understanding regional variations in local authority offerings.

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people should be listened to and taken seriously in all decisions being made that affects them. In short, it gives all children the right to express their views freely, have these views given due weight and be heard and represented in all administrative and judicial proceedings when decisions are being made about them.

Practitioners should be guided by this article, empowering the voices of the children and young people they work with.

### Advocacy (Statutory Entitlement)

The Children Act (1989) provides looked after children and care leavers a statutory right to advocacy, under Section 26A. This right to advocacy ensures that children and young people have their views, wishes and feelings heard when important decisions are being made about their lives. The IRO Handbook (2010) reaffirms this, stating that Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) must ensure that every child must be made aware of their right to an advocate, how they can access one and the role that they can play in their care.

Advocates are independent, meaning they do not work for carers or children's services and are only there for the child. They can:

- Explain what choices and legal rights a child or young person is entitled to.
- Ensure that their views, wishes and feelings are listened to and respected.
- Help a child or young person have a say in decisions being made about their life.
- Explain the situation to a child or young person and aid them in understanding why certain decisions have been made.
- Support a child or young person in speaking up for themselves.
- Attend meetings and reviews on behalf of, or alongside, a child or young person.
- Challenge decisions that a child or young person may want stopped, started or changed.
- Support a child or young person in making a formal complaint.
  - If a looked after child wishes to progress proceedings under the Children Act 1989, the IRO must support the child in obtaining legal advice or identify another appropriate adult who can support them.

Every child and young person have certain rights, no matter who they are, where they live or what their situation may be. It is crucial that they are informed of what their rights and entitlements at the earliest opportunity to ensure they know what help they can ask for and identify when they are not being treated properly.

In Wales, children and young people are entitled to an 'active' (opt-out) offer of advocacy on statutory footing. This means that when a child enters care, or at any other moment in their care journey, they are automatically connected with an independent advocate who explains advocacy and offers their services. This guarantees that every child is made aware of their rights and how to seek advocacy support should they need it.

Providers like the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) deliver advocacy services across England and Wales. You can find the advocacy provider in your local area using the ['Who is My Advocacy Provider'](#) tool.

“My advocate did the unthinkable. They got my voice heard. They were understanding of situations and non-judgemental” – A young person supported by an [NYAS \(National Youth Advocacy Service\)](#) Independent Advocate.

### Independent Visitor(s) (Statutory Entitlement)

The Children Act (1989) provides looked after children and care leavers a statutory right to an Independent Visitor (IV) which must be promoted, publicised and accessible. Local authorities are expected to promote IV services in line with their duties as corporate parents.

An IV is not employed by carers or children's services and volunteer their time to befriend and visit a child or young person, building a trusting, reliable and positive relationship over time. It is expected that the IV will develop a long-lasting relationship, supporting the child or young person as they transition to adulthood.

A child or young person will have the opportunity to try new activities, such as going on a day trip, visiting the cinema, or trying a new sport, away from their placement. In time, the relationship may evolve into a lasting friendship together if that is something that the child or young person wants.

“Our visits have been the highlight of my life and you have been the best friend I could ever ask for. Thanks so much for everything, I've become such a better person and more confident.” – A young person, supported by a [NYAS \(National Youth Advocacy Service\)](#) Independent Visitor.

### Continuous learning and continual improvement and measuring impact

This is at the heart of any successful and responsive policy framework. With respect to enhancing services for care experienced individuals, this not only involves staying up to date with current research and best practices, but also learning from the unique experiences and insights that come directly from conducting EqlAs.

A practical way to document lessons learned is by keeping a comprehensive log or record of each EIA undertaken. This would include the process, the findings, the implemented changes, and the results of those changes. This might be in the form of a shared digital document or database that all relevant staff members can access and contribute to.

Guidelines that could be regularly updated based on these insights may encompass best practices for undertaking EqlAs, strategies for engaging with care experienced individuals, ways to mitigate potential negative impacts of policy changes, among others.

Continuous improvement is not solely beneficial for council policies; it also contributes to the personal and professional growth of individual council officers. Being part of a

process of ongoing learning and development can heighten job satisfaction, motivate staff, and lead to improved service outcomes.

However, there is a drawback to relying heavily on individual expertise: when staff members move to different roles or leave, their unique knowledge and insights can be lost. This is often referred to as "institutional memory loss". Therefore, it's crucial that continuous improvement and learning are embedded systemically within the organisation, rather than just depending on individual staff members. Strategies to mitigate this risk might include robust documentation practices, comprehensive handover processes, regular training and development opportunities, and fostering a culture of knowledge sharing.

For care experienced individuals, the requirement to repeat their personal histories can be both emotionally exhausting and potentially retraumatising. Local authorities should strive to reduce this burden, for instance by accurately recording relevant details during initial interactions and ensuring these details are easily accessible to all relevant staff members for future interactions.

Strategies to counteract the loss of key personnel might include cross-training, where multiple staff members are trained in key areas, establishing a mentoring programme where more experienced staff members share their knowledge and insights with newer or less experienced staff members, and developing succession plans to ensure smooth transitions when staff members do leave.

By creating a culture of continuous learning and improvement that is systemically embedded within the organisation, local authorities can ensure they are effectively serving care-experienced individuals in a sustainable and resilient manner.

## [Additional resources, links and literature](#)

### [Safety Net Service](#)

In partnership with the Department for Education, NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service) is proud to offer the [Safety Net](#) service for care-experienced children and young people across England. With a 'no child turned away' policy, NYAS' Helpline team will:

Ensure all children and young people receive advocacy support they are entitled to from their local authority, or via their local advocacy service.

- Provide issue-based advocacy directly in a way that suits a child or young person, should their authority be unable or unwilling to provide advocacy support. This may also include:
  - Specialist non-instructed advocacy.
  - Self-advocacy information provision.
- Inform all children and young people of their rights and entitlements as a care-experienced young person.

- Provide advice and support, appropriately signposting all children and young people to the services they may need.  
Be a positive force for reducing the barriers to advocacy, providing information to the Department for Education, the Children's Commissioner and Ofsted in pursuit of ensuring all children and young people receive the advocacy support they are entitled to.

The Safety Net Service can be accessed through the NYAS [Website](#), by freephone (0808 808 1001), online [chat](#), WhatsApp (07494788875) or text support, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by texting NYAS to 85258.

- [Care Leaver Local Offer : Home \(careleaveroffer.co.uk\)](http://careleaveroffer.co.uk)
- [The Care Experience Podcast \(libsyn.com\)](http://libsyn.com)
- [The Coram Voice](#)
- [The Fostering Podcast](#)
- [The Care Experienced Conference Podcast](#)
- [Who Cares? Scotland Podcast](#)
- [Looking After Each Other](#)