

12 January 2026

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South Lakeland House
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Dear Mr Vasic

Focused visit to Westmorland and Furness children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the focused visit to Westmorland and Furness children's services on 25 and 26 November 2025. His Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Leanne Cooper and Lisa Walsh.

Inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for care leavers. This included a focus on the quality of support for young people as they move into adulthood and the response to vulnerable care leavers.

Throughout this letter, care leavers are referred to as care-experienced young people because this is the preferred term in the local authority.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework.

Headline findings

Since the last ILACS inspection in April 2024, when services for care leavers were judged to require improvement to be good, the quality and consistency of services for care-experienced young people have been strengthened and improved. Young people now receive timely support when transitioning from the cared for team, with the early allocation of a personal adviser (PA). Keeping-in-touch arrangements for young people aged over 21 have been strengthened and young people now understand their health histories through supportive relationships with their PAs.

Following the last inspection, senior leaders and key stakeholders have worked effectively together to ensure that corporate parenting responsibilities are well understood and aligned with plans to launch a child-friendly community. This means that the senior leadership team has prioritised young people's voices through the pledges they have made, and by the implementation of an improved participation strategy, where children influence and shape practice development. Inspectors saw the positive impact of this through the recent development of a care leavers' hub.

Leaders have welcomed external scrutiny from sector partners, which has shaped a range of service improvements. The development of the cared for and care-experience partnership is providing additional oversight to ensure that these strategic ambitions and practice developments are regularly monitored, measured and lead to tangible improvements.

What needs to improve in this area of social work practice?

- The quality and consistency of pathway plans. (Outcome 4, national framework)
- The quality and consistency of support offered to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. (Outcome 4, national framework)
- The quality and consistency of support offered to young people not in education, employment or training. (Outcome 4, national framework)

Main findings

Most care-experienced young people benefit from trusted and stable relationships with their PAs. PAs are ambitious and proud of the young people they support and celebrate their achievements and special occasions. Strong relationships ensure that young people know how to access support when they need it.

Most young people benefit from effective transitions between the cared-for children and the care-experienced team. PAs are allocated early to young people, which supports young people to build meaningful relationships and prepare for transition to the care-experienced team.

PAs are persistent in ensuring that young people's well-being and safety needs are prioritised. Care-experienced young people told inspectors that they feel supported, listened to and that PAs are always there for them.

Care-experienced young people are supported to develop and maintain their family and friends' networks through family group conferencing. This means that young people benefit from supportive networks, particularly when they are living independently.

Many young people benefit from the continuity of their independent reviewing officers (IROs) remaining involved in their lives beyond 18 years. For some young people, their relationships with their PAs and IROs continue well into adulthood. Since the last inspection, leaders have strengthened the keeping-in-touch arrangements for young people 21 years and over. Trusted relationships between young people and their PAs mean that young people know how to access support when they need it. A culture of 'always here' is supporting young people to be able to contact their PA or keeping-in-touch adviser for support when needed.

Most young people have access to all key documents, such as a National Insurance number, passports and birth certificates. PAs work effectively to support young people to develop their independence skills and to feel safe in their homes.

The health and emotional well-being needs of most care-experienced young people are carefully considered. Since the last inspection, most young people now understand their own health histories and all young people are supported to access universal services, and most are registered with GPs and dentists.

PAs are aware of the local offer, and can describe it well, which is supporting most young people to understand their rights and entitlements. Care-experienced young people are able to access council tax support, leisure passes and driving lessons. The current offer does not include free Wi-Fi and this is something leaders are exploring with partners. The financial offer when young people go to university is strong.

Some pathway plans are effective, co-produced and regularly reviewed. Clear mapping is completed with the young person, meaning that their voices and personal goals are understood and well supported. However, for a small number of young people, there is more variability in the quality of pathway plans, which means that their needs and vulnerabilities are not always clearly recognised or articulated. This limits the quality of the support available to young people to help them to be ambitious for their futures.

PAs are alert to issues of exploitation and risk and take decisive action to ensure that young people are protected from harm. Increased management oversight is cognisant of risk and ensures that action is taken to protect the most vulnerable young people. Nevertheless, the use of risk assessment and safety planning is not always visible on the young person's record and there is more to do to ensure that support continues beyond the age of 18 years.

There are a range of accommodation options available for care-experienced young people in Westmorland and Furness, and most live in safe, stable and suitable homes that meet their needs. Most young people receive the support they need from their PA to live independently when the time is right for them. However, for some care-experienced young people, there is limited housing support, which means that they are reliant on the PA ensuring that their new home is suitably furnished before they can move in. When young people are not ready to live independently, they are supported to stay with their former carers under appropriate 'staying put' arrangements.

Most young people in Westmorland and Furness are supported to be ambitious about their futures. Individual needs and ambitions are well considered and regular pathway planning enables young people to achieve their goals. PAs support young people to consider a range of opportunities available to them, such as

apprenticeships, college courses and different employment options. However, for a small number of young people, the response to support them back into employment, education or training continues to be variable. Senior leaders recognise that there is more to do to support young people back into education, employment and training, through the creation of a dedicated careers adviser within the care leavers' hub. It was too soon to see the impact of this.

When unaccompanied asylum-seeking children arrive in Westmorland and Furness, they are supported to seek independent legal advice and provided with safe accommodation. Most social workers and PAs have a good understanding of each young person's identity and cultural needs. However, some PAs lack awareness of the experiences and the journeys these children have undertaken before arriving in the area. This limits the quality of support being offered.

When care-experienced young people are in custody, PAs continue to see them regularly and remain focused on preparation for leaving custody. PAs support young people to maintain contact with family and friends who are important to them.

For young people who are parents, PAs provide practical and emotionally sensitive support. PAs advocate strongly for young parents, ensuring that their views are heard and their needs prioritised. Young parents are supported to access local community parent and baby groups, which is helping them to build positive networks and reduce isolation.

Performance and quality assurance activity is providing leaders with an accurate line of sight into current practice. Leaders embrace findings from audits and use these to support wider learning development through a range of quality assurance activity, including practice weeks.

Collaborative auditing processes with social workers and PAs provide further opportunity for learning. Leaders support the continuous professional development of social workers and PAs by providing opportunities for learning through practice bulletins, dedicated practice weeks and an annual training programme. In most audits, feedback from parents, carers and young people is providing leaders with a greater line of sight into how practice is making a difference. This, however, is not consistently reflected in individual supervision or used to inform further learning and development.

Social workers and PAs describe senior leaders as visible, supportive and available. For a small number of PAs, caseloads are high. Leaders are aware of this and have taken appropriate action to ensure that PAs are supported through increased management oversight and further investment in the care-experienced team. PAs told inspectors that they felt listened to and that the training opportunities afforded to them are now relevant to their role. PAs also describe recent improvements and how these are making a difference to the quality of support they can offer. PAs

spoke proudly of the recent development of the care-experienced hub and described how young people were able to participate in the designing of this.

All those care-experienced young people spoken to during the visit told inspectors that they valued the importance of trusted relationships with their PAs, who provided both practical and emotional support. They felt listened to and involved in planning. Young people appreciated the opportunity to shape and influence practice development, including the recruitment of senior leaders.

Ofsted will take the findings from this focused visit into account when planning the next inspection or visit.

Yours sincerely

Leanne Cooper
His Majesty's Inspector