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Edward Timpson MP

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Den M Dickson,

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Thank you for your letter of 14 December, about your petition calling on government to extend 'staying put' arrangements for young people placed in children's homes.

The government wants to ensure that all care leavers, wherever they have been placed, are given all the necessary support as they make the transition to adulthood. I am personally very committed to making this aspiration a reality for all care leavers. I completely agree with you, therefore, that young people should not feel pressured to leave care prematurely. They need to be consulted and involved in making plans for their futures and should only be expected to move on from their final care placement once they are ready to take this significant step.

I can understand your position about the perceived inequality that the 'staying put' arrangements create between young people in foster care and children's homes. The issue, though, is whether it is appropriate to place a new duty on local authorities to provide a particular type of support. Research has found that many young people are dissatisfied with the support they receive and, in particular, that there are shortfalls in planning and preparation for leaving care, which leaves their needs unmet. Consequently, our immediate priority is to press ahead with driving up the quality of residential care, and we have set out a programme of work to do this. We have to get the system right before considering whether to impose a duty on local authorities that requires them to provide 'staying put' arrangements to all young people leaving care from children's homes.

There would also be practical and legal issues to be worked through if, in the future, there was a duty on councils to fund 'staying put' arrangements for care leavers in homes registered by Ofsted on the basis that they are 'wholly or mainly for children'. I have asked my officials to work with the National Children's Bureau, Who Cares? Trust and Catch 22, who are looking at the practical issues of introducing 'staying put' arrangements in children's homes over the coming year.