

What support are councils offering care leavers in need of private tenancies across England and Wales?

Freedom of Information Request briefing about councils in England and Wales acting as guarantors and offering rental deposits, for care leavers in the private rental sector.

In the UK, the average age for young people to move out of their family home is 24 years old. For young people who have grown up in care, this transition happens at just 18 years old. Too often this happens alongside other important moments of their life and when support services are being reduced, sometimes known as the ‘cliff edge of care’.

All care leavers should be able to not just have a home, but also a choice of where they live, after leaving care. For some care leavers, supported accommodation or continuing to live with foster carers may be the best option for them. For others, they may want to live independently in social housing or privately rented accommodation. What’s most important is making sure that all care leavers have equal access to all housing options and that they are safe, secure and stable.

The Prime Minister announced in September 2024 that care leavers will get priority access to social housing, wherever they choose to live. This is a very important and welcome reform, especially as social housing may often be a preferred option for care leavers for many reasons. The private rented sector also plays a significant role in accommodating young care leavers, but often care leavers are locked out and let down by this sector. Care leavers have told NYAS that this is because of challenges such as not having a guarantor, access to a rent deposit or because they cannot find a landlord willing to rent to them because of their status as a care leaver:

“

When you’re a care leaver everybody wants a guarantor, regardless of how good your credit history is.

”

“

It was quite hard to actually get a landlord that would accept a care leaver because of all the things said about care leavers... he [the landlord] wouldn’t deal with care experience.

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Freedom of Information Request Data

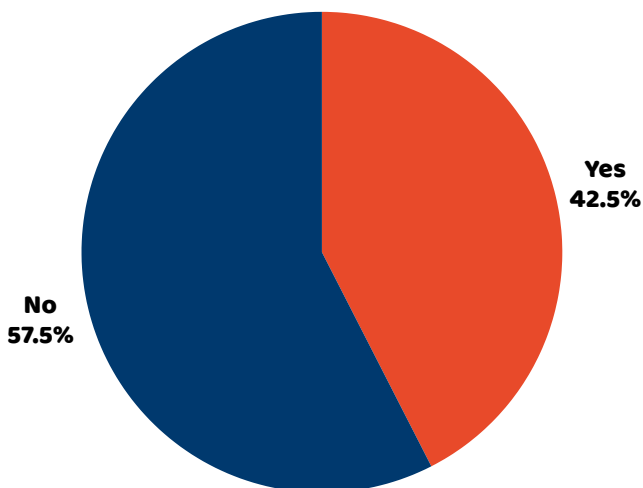
In March 2024, NYAS sent Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests to local authorities in England and Wales to find out what support is available from their council for care leavers wishing to access private rented accommodation in their local area.

The FOI request was issued to 174 local authorities, and we received 129 responses (113 in England and 16 in Wales), representing a majority of councils responding in both England and Wales. In the details that follow, percentages are calculated from the total number of responses overall (129), or within the relevant nation’s set of responses, not from the total of all local authorities asked.

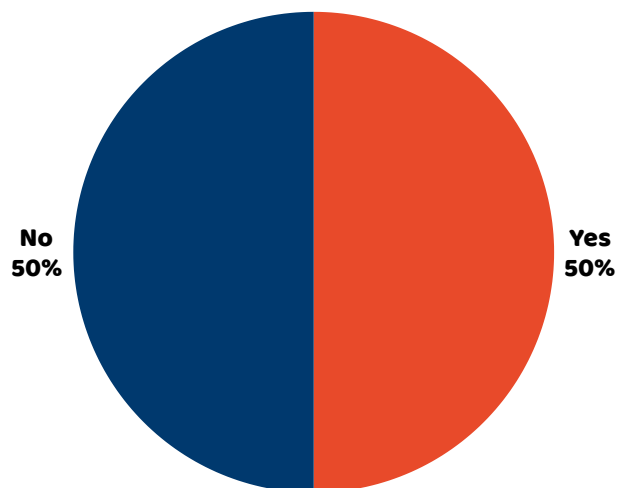
Access to a Guarantor

Only **56 (43.41%)** local authorities across England and Wales will offer to act as a guarantor for a care leaver wishing to access private rented accommodation. In England, this means that only **48 local authorities (42.48%)** will act as a guarantor for a care leaver wishing to access privately rented accommodation. In Wales, there is an **equal split** of local authorities that will and will not act as a guarantor.

Local authorities in England offering to act as a rent guarantor for care-experienced young people to access when seeking to rent a privately rented property:



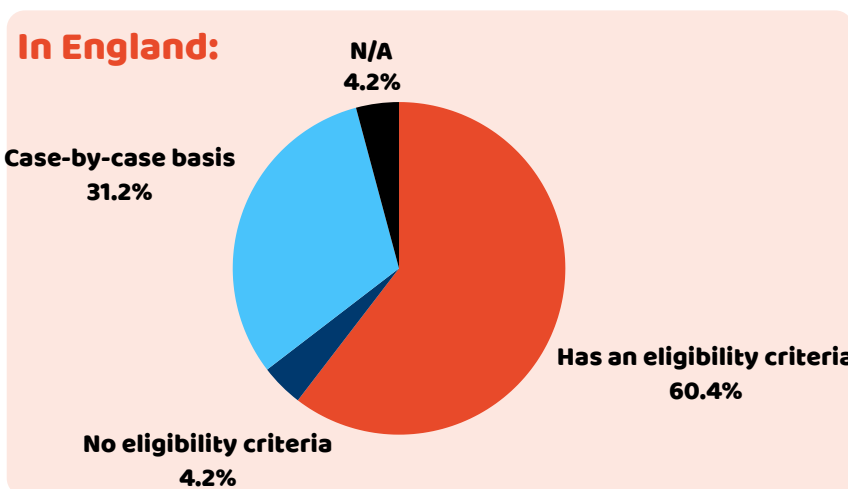
Local authorities in Wales offering to act as a rent guarantor for care-experienced young people to access when seeking to rent a privately rented property:



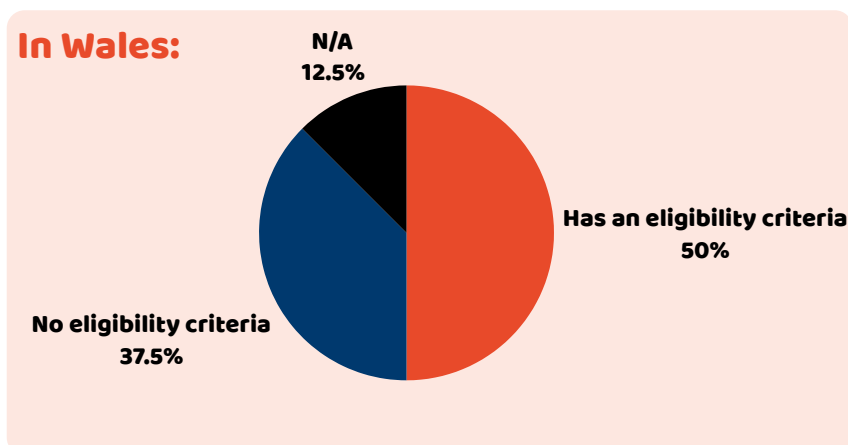
Eligibility Criteria

Even when a local authority will act as a guarantor, not all care leavers in the area can access this offer. **33 (58.93%)** local authorities across England and Wales that will act as a guarantor have an eligibility criteria that a care leaver will need to meet, and an additional **15 (26.79%)** make the decision on a case-by-case basis. This means that access to guarantors for care leavers remains unequal at both national and local levels.

It is important to note that even where councils do offer to be a guarantor, some landlords and lettings agents are reported as refusing to accept an ‘organisational’ guarantor, insisting that a guarantor must be a named individual person.



“Acceptance is not automatic; you have to apply, and you have to be able to show that you are good at managing your money, you have made a budget and can, afford the place you want to-rent.”



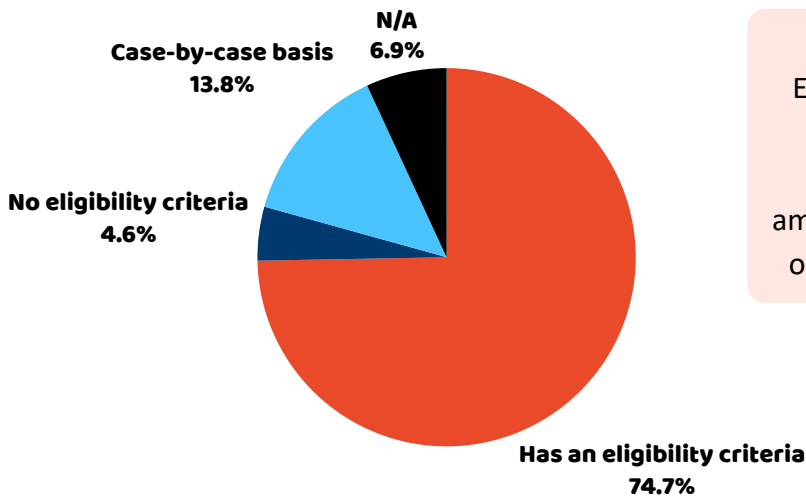
Examples of local authorities’ eligibility criteria to act as a guarantor:

- Only if the care leaver is enrolled in university
- Evidence of skills such as independent living, budgeting, problem solving
- Engaging regularly with professionals and Pathway Planning
- No significant debt
- Needs assessment shows they are motivated
- Completed a Gold Skills Course
- Evidence of maintaining a previous accommodation with no issues

Rent Deposit Schemes

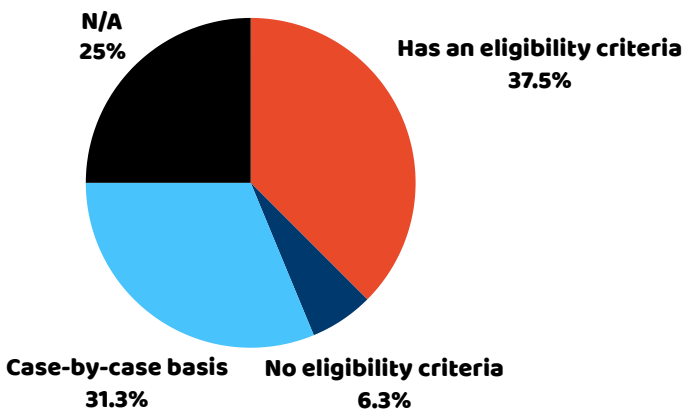
99 (76.74%) local authorities across England and Wales will provide care leavers with a rent deposit when they are wishing to rent privately let accommodation. This is 87 (76.99%) local authorities in England and 12 (75%) in Wales. However, access to these schemes also remains unequal. 71 (68.93%) local authorities across England and Wales who do provide rent deposit schemes have a criteria for care leavers to meet, and an additional 17 (16.50%) will only provide deposits on a case-by-case basis.

In England:



64 (62.14%) local authorities in England and Wales have a limit of how much they will offer care leavers in deposit and these amounts ranged from the equivalent of one month's rent up to £1000.

In Wales:



13 (12.62%) local authorities across England and Wales stated that there is no limit to how much they will offer care leavers and an additional 22 (21.36%) said deposit amounts vary on a case-by-case basis.

Examples of local authorities' eligibility criteria to provide rent deposit schemes:

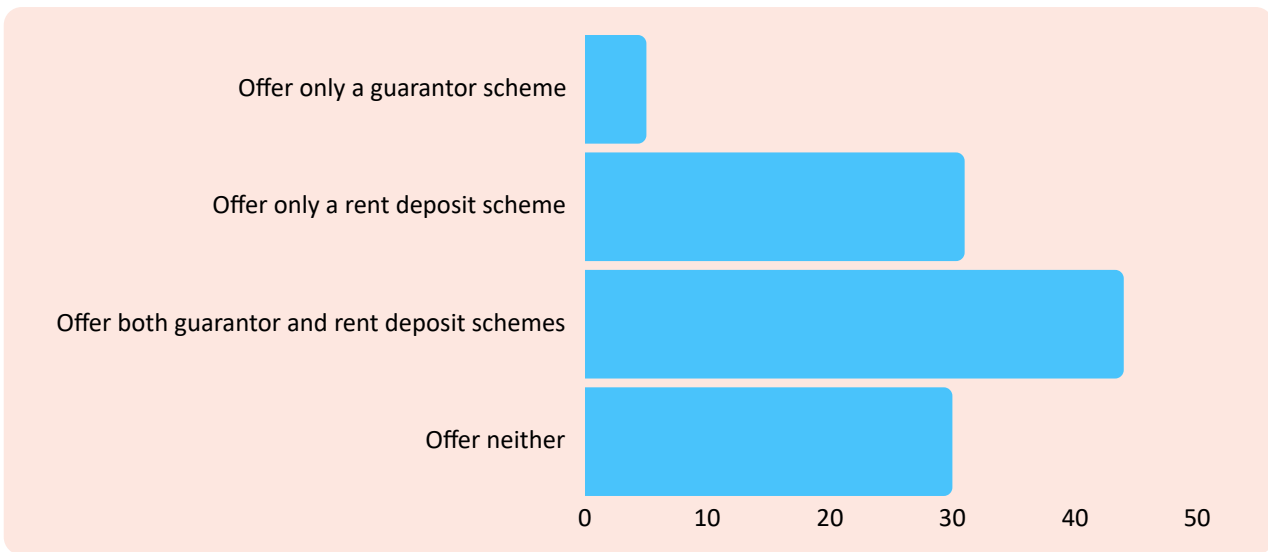
- If private renting is the only available option for a young person
- The young person agrees to return the deposit advance at the end of the tenancy or within a year of the payment being made, or by their 21st / 25th birthday
- Only if other schemes such as homelessness prevention or Discretionary Housing Payment are not available
- If the young person can prove they have no funds available and agree to pay back £10-20 per month

Living Out of Area

We asked local authorities what support they will provide for young people who were under the care of their local authority as children but are now living in a different local authority as care leavers.

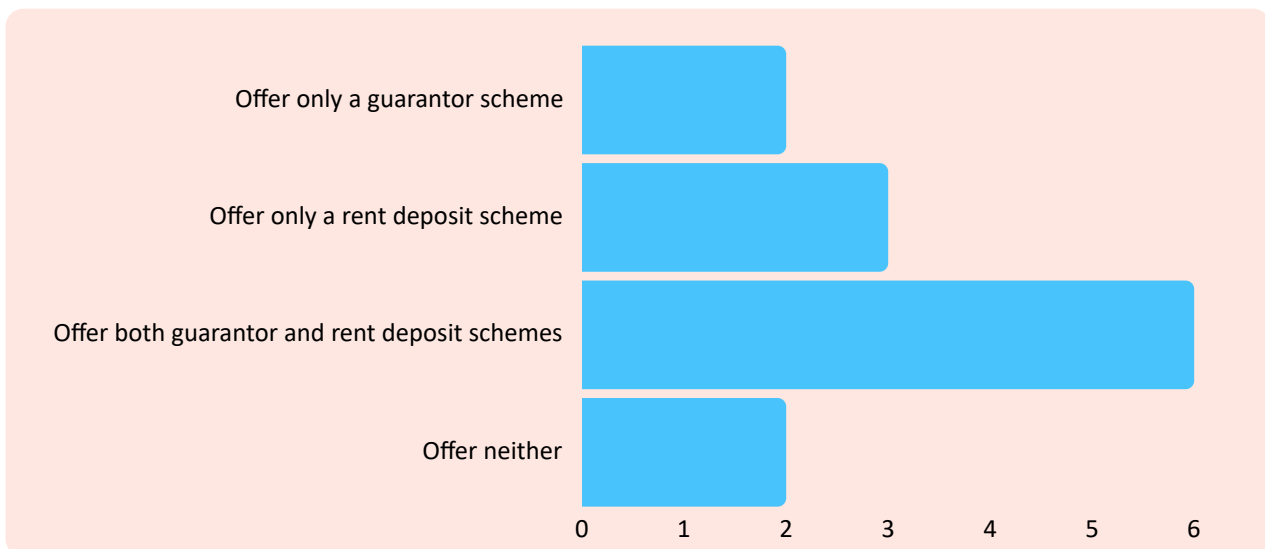
In England:

- 5 (4.42%) offer only a guarantor scheme
- 31 (27.43%) offer only a rent deposit scheme
- 44 (38.94%) offer both guarantor and rent deposit schemes
- 30 (26.55%) offer neither



In Wales:

- 2 (12.50%) offer only a guarantor scheme
- 3 (18.75%) offer only a rent deposit scheme
- 6 (37.50%) offer both guarantor and rent deposit schemes
- 2 (12%) offer neither



Implications and Potential Improvements

The data we have collected suggests that in some parts of the country local authorities are providing good support for care leavers who wish to access private rented accommodation. However, the provision of this support is not equally or readily available to all care leavers across both nations. Even at local level, access to guarantor or rent deposit schemes is often qualified by criteria for eligibility, and while some of those criteria appear perfectly reasonable, some appear only to mimic those imposed by landlords themselves or apply only for care leavers going to university. It is to be wondered how a young person who has no access to guarantor and deposit support, but who still needs to find a home that may only be available through the private rental sector, could possibly do so as a care leaver.

With a new UK Government and new First Minister in Wales, NYAS strongly believes now is the time to reform the housing system for care leavers to make sure they are no longer locked out and let down by the private rented sector.

In England:

- The Renters' Rights Bill currently going through UK parliament offers a real opportunity to add care leavers to new protections against discrimination by private landlords and lettings agents. Section 3 of the Bill prohibits discrimination by landlords against potential or current tenants who are benefits recipients and/or parents with one or more children, and both grounds will offer protection to many care leavers who fall into those categories. But we believe that care leavers could be added to this new and important protection as a distinct category of tenants who can face prejudice from landlords and are overtly disadvantaged in private renting.
- The Renters' Rights Bill may also be a legislative opportunity to ensure that councils cannot be rejected as guarantors for the young people they have corporate parenting duties towards.
- The best, most supportive and effective practice among the many councils who do take proactive action to support their care leavers as private sector tenants, can and should be spread nationwide. With the potential expansion of corporate parenting duties, and a forthcoming Children's Wellbeing Bill, there is a vital and timely opportunity to seek commitments from national governments and from councils to spread good guarantor and deposit practice as a standard to all areas, and to invest in councils' capacity to proactively prevent homelessness for all care leavers.

Implications and Potential Improvements

In Wales

- As both housing and children’s social care are devolved matters in Wales, the further application of renter’s rights reforms will have to integrate with Welsh policy and systems in both areas. We understand that the penalty for a breach of rental discrimination provisions in Wales will be a criminal offence in line with the wider housing framework in Wales.
- We understand that the UK government in England has been working closely with the Welsh and Scottish Governments to extend the new rental discrimination provisions to Wales and Scotland through the Renters’ Rights Bill. We encourage the specification of care leavers in these provisions in their application in Wales, just as we do in England.
- We encourage the Welsh Government to specify the provision of rental deposits and guarantor schemes as a requirement of all councils under their corporate parenting duty to care leavers, especially as the Senedd considers its own Health and Social Care reforms.

This briefing seeks simply to share the findings from the FOI data which can be used to inform the high current political and sector focus on care leaver homelessness and legal reforms to renters’ rights.

NYAS is working in partnership with Generation Rent and Barnardo’s to recommend amendments to the Renters Rights Bill and improve protection for tenants who are care leavers. Our recommendations for the Bill can be read [here](#).

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