

Continuing care focus area findings – inspection year 2024-25

Publication date: October 2025

Publication code COMMS-1025-574



Keeping The Promise at the heart of what we do

Young people's right to continuing care, to develop and sustain nurturing and supportive relationships with their care givers, and to be cared by them for as long as is needed, is underpinned by [The Promise](#).

The Care Inspectorate, Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection (CELCIS) and Clan Childlaw worked collaboratively in 2021 to promote legislation, guidance and responsibilities which embedded young people's right to continuing care. We undertook a series of webinars and developed a [practice note](#) and [resources](#) to increase young people's awareness of their rights. Our [Guidance for services on the provision of continuing care](#) is intended to support providers, to ensure young people are able to stay put, and to move on at a time when they are ready to do so.

During our inspection year 2024-2025 we introduced a focus area which aimed to look at how regulated children and young people's services were continuing to promote young people's right to continuing care.

Research strongly supports that one of the most significant factors influencing outcomes for looked after young people leaving care is the age at which they transition from care to interdependent living (Wade, 1997¹; Broad, 2007²; Stein 2012³). The [Sweet 16?](#) report found that "many young people are still being pushed out of the care system before they are ready" and the [Still a Bairn?](#) report found that young people living in care moved into independent living at a younger age than non-care experienced young people. Research also demonstrates that young people leaving care before they are ready can experience poorer outcomes in terms of housing, employment and mental health ([McGhee et al., 2022](#)).

Our focus area was centred on a sample of inspections of care homes for children and young people, fostering agencies, adult placement services and one school care accommodation service (special residential school). During these inspections, inspectors collected data using a set of focus area questions and the results are detailed in this report.

¹ Developing Leaving Care Services Tapping the Potential of Foster Carers

² Care Leavers in Transition

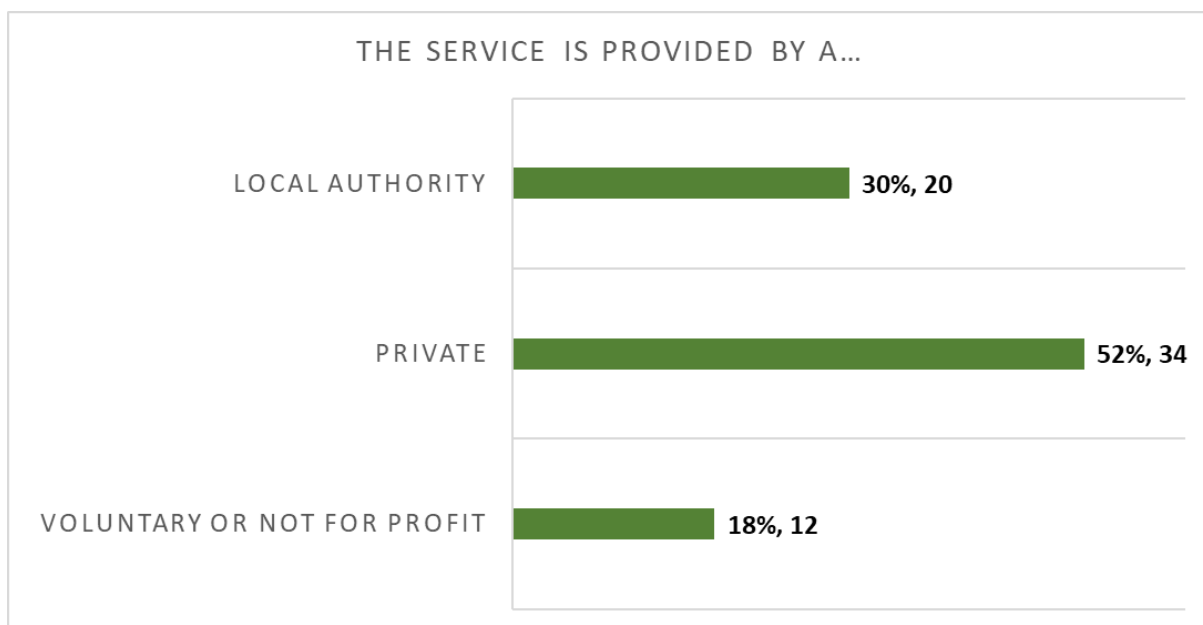
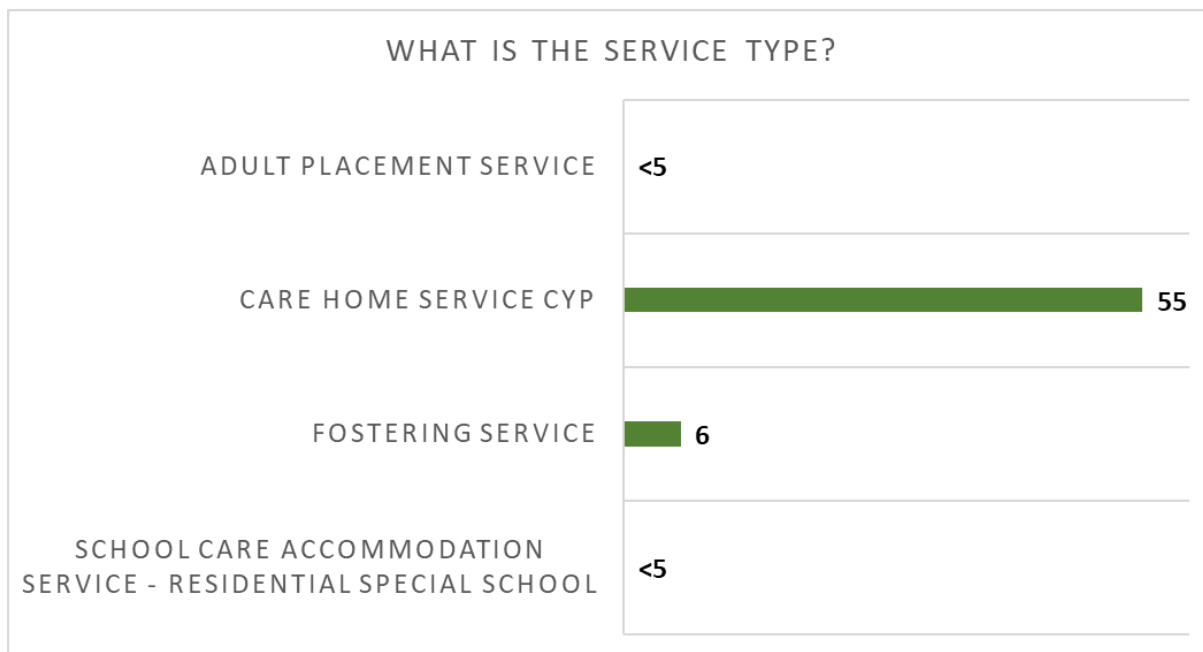
³ Young People Leaving Care: Supporting pathways to adulthood

Key findings from our sample

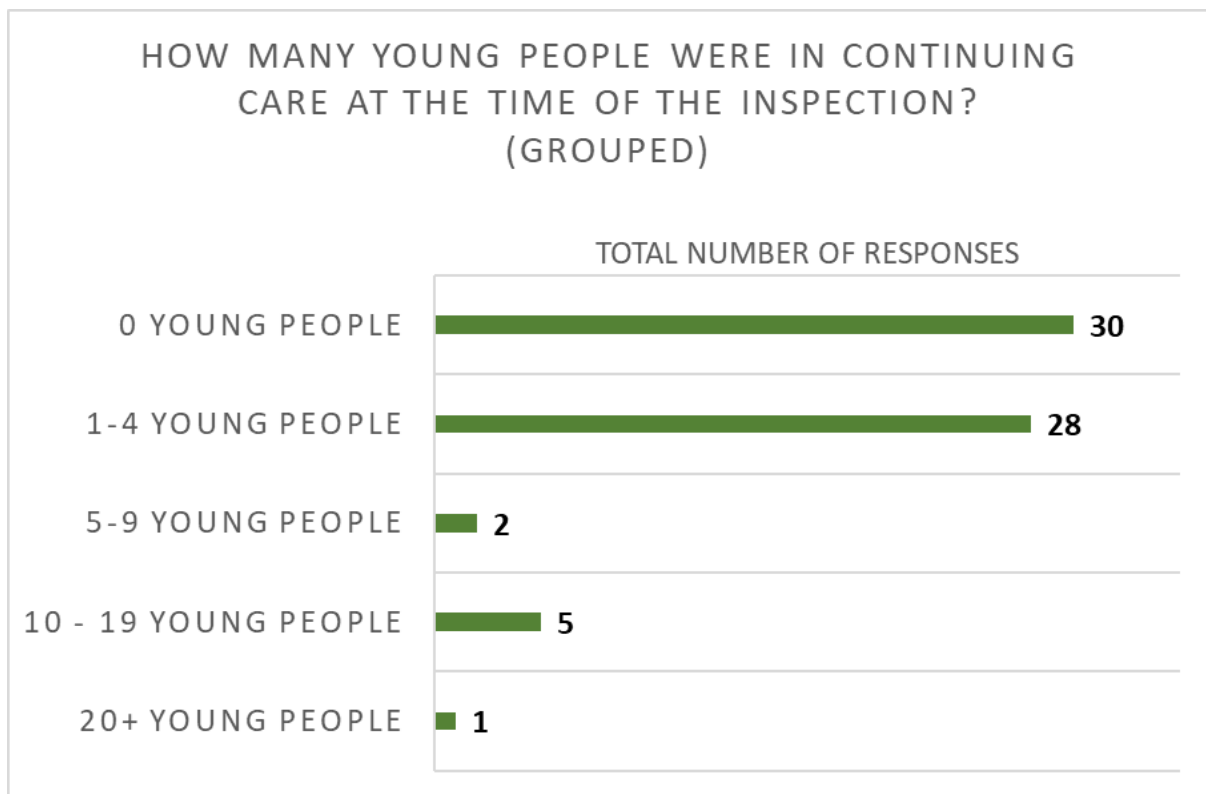
- Over 54% of young people over the age of 18 years continued to live in their service.
- The majority of young people receiving continuing care were experiencing quality care and good outcomes.
- 70% of services had a continuing care policy in place.
- 70% of services were ensuring that placing authorities understood the service's commitment to continuing care.
- 47% of care homes needed to improve their admissions guidance to reflect their commitment to continuing care.
- For care homes, there was room for improvement in making their commitment to continuing care clear in placement agreements.
- Most services were proactive in ensuring welfare assessments were undertaken by local authorities.

Service type and provider

Sixty-six services, delivered by local authority, private providers and not for profit providers, made up our sample as detailed below.



From the services sampled, the following numbers of young people were receiving continuing care.



Outcomes for children and young people

From our sample of 66 services, 36 young people over the age of 18 years continued to live in their service and the majority were experiencing quality care and good outcomes. Some of the examples of good outcomes noted by inspectors in services are included throughout this report.

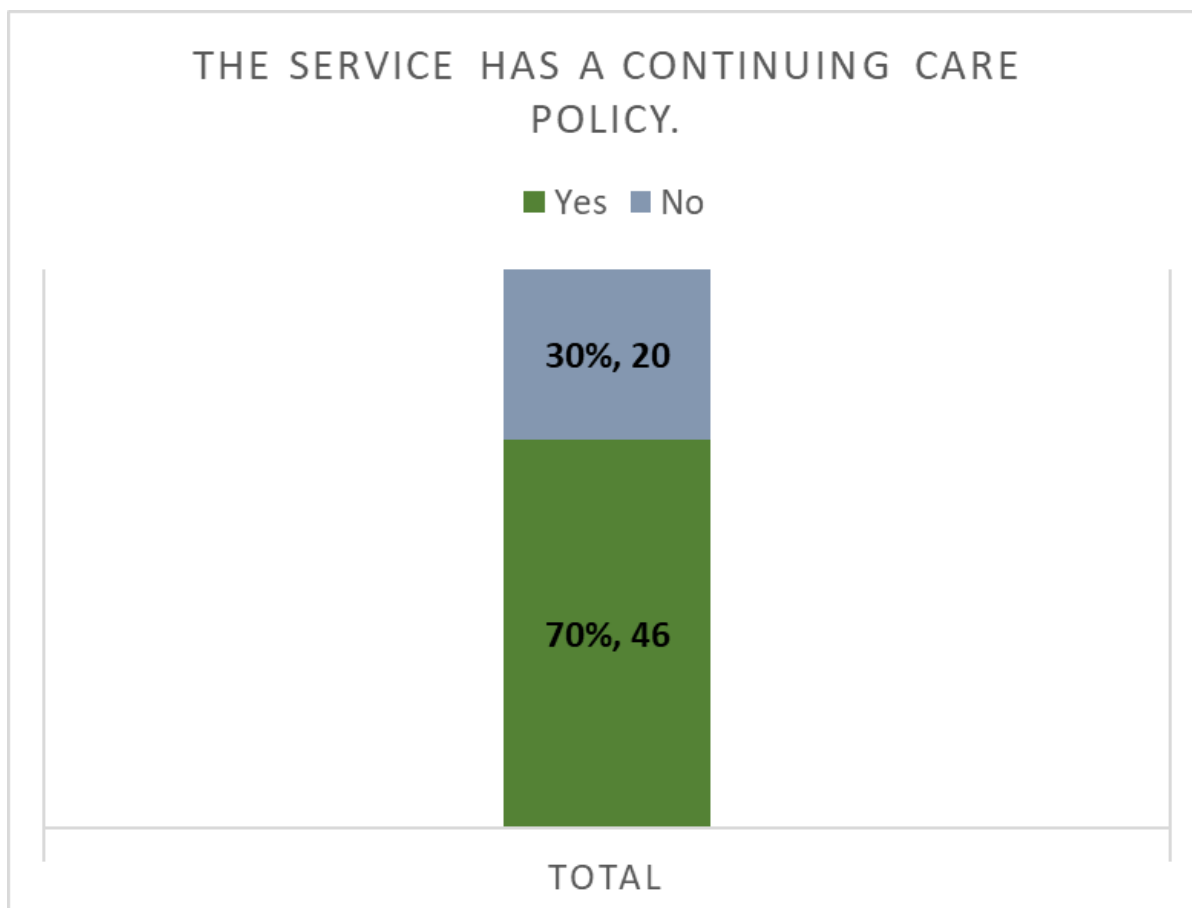
Practice example

A service strongly advocated for a welfare assessment to be carried out and supported the young person to seek support from Clan Childlaw and Who Cares? Scotland. The outcome of this professional advocacy was that the local authority agreed to continue to support the young person's placement with long term carers on a continuing care basis. The young person has since started college and stays on campus during term time, but the continuing care placement remains open. He returns to his carer's home for weekends and holidays and continues to receive practical and emotional support from his carers.

Underpinning inputs, processes and outputs

Presence of a continuing care policy

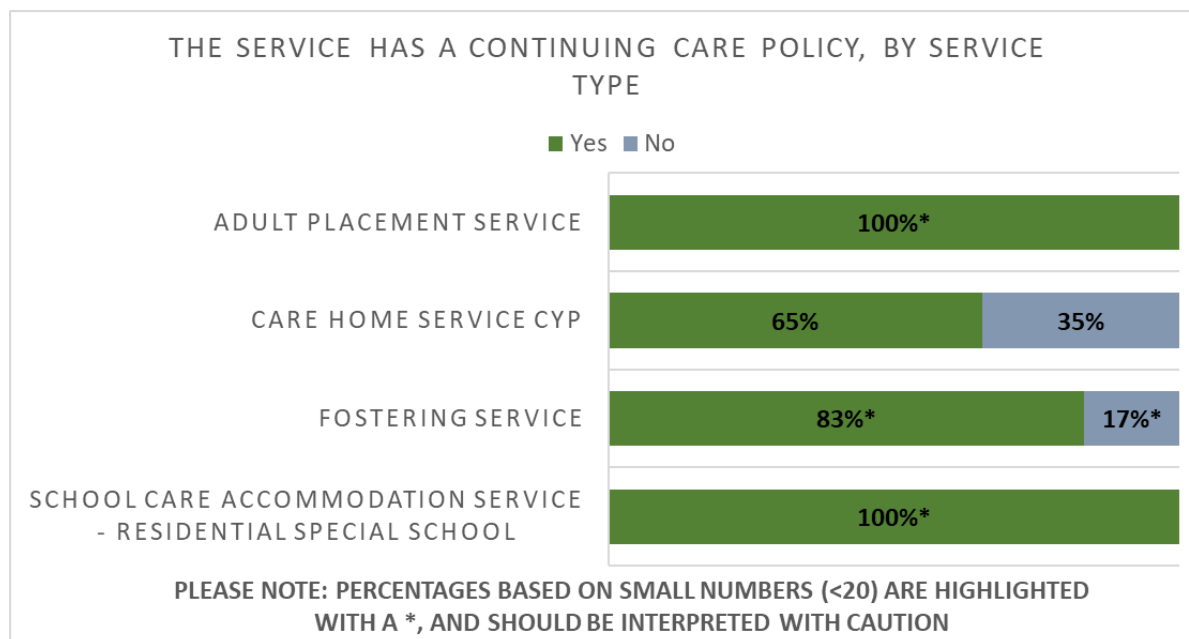
The aim is that all children and young people's services should have a continuing care policy to reflect the rights of young people to remain in services where it is in their interest to do so and when it is their wish to remain. A robust framework of practice empowers services to consistently advocate for children and young people and facilitates accountability and shared and clear expectations with other partners.



Practice example

Young people were in the process of being positively supported into adult services with support from the service. The new team visited the service and shadowed shifts. Care staff were involved in the transition plan and visits once the young person moved on to ensure the young person experienced continuity of support. Another young person was at university and being supported to stay in the service for as long as they wanted.

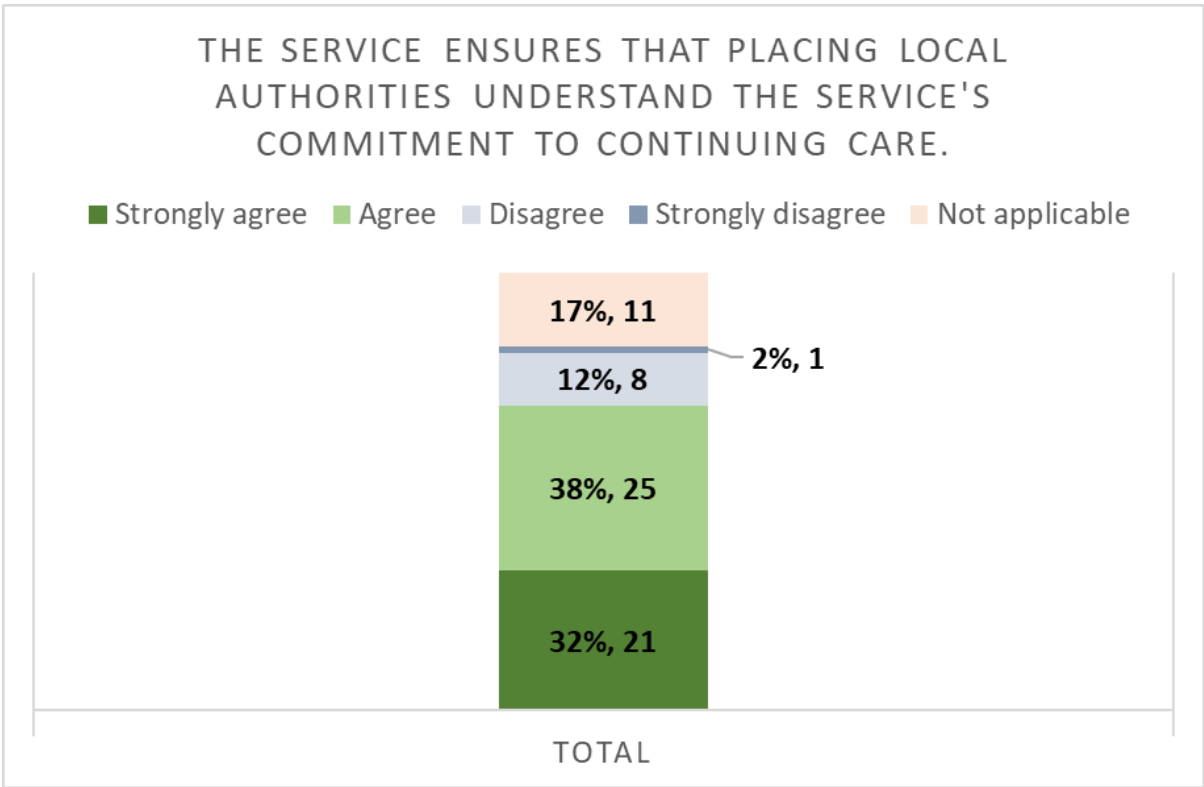
We found that all adult placement services in the sample had a policy in place, as per their registration requirements. Care home services needed to improve most in this area. One inspector noted that one care home service had a policy in draft, another noted that the policy was being developed, another noted good outcomes for older young people despite a policy not being in place.



The service ensures that placing authorities understand the service’s commitment to continuing care.

As CELCIS affirm, children and young people should be made aware of their rights around continuing care and information about all the options available to them as they grow up. They should be given time and support to consider what is best for them and should have opportunities to talk about their plans and options with someone they trust. Services should therefore ensure that expectations around continuing care are explicit prior to children and young people arriving at the service. This should be part of an ongoing and pro-active dialogue with all other partners responsible for the young person’s ongoing care and support.

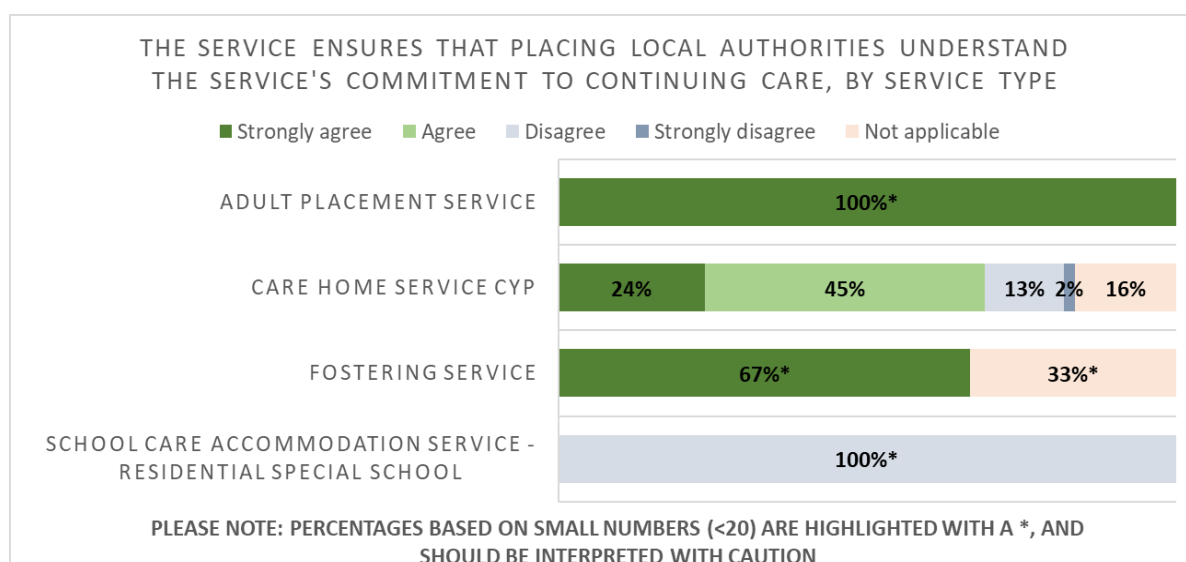
Our findings from the sample of services found there was room for improvement in these aspects.



*Please note percentages in this table are rounded up.

Practice example

Two young people had been supported until the age of 19 and had transitioned or were in the process of transitioning to flats with support. There was a comprehensive, person-centred, planned transition for both young people, with new staff visiting to meet them and understand their routines and needs. College placements were arranged for the upcoming term, to ensure they had a routine and focus when moving on. Another young person was attending university after the summer, and staff understood the importance of them staying in the house to provide emotional support and help throughout their studies.



In interpreting this data, it is likely that the percentage for “not applicable” linked to fostering services may be because they consider continuing care being the responsibility of their linked or stand-alone adult placement service. The data for adult placement services supports this. From inspection of fostering services, we see positive outcomes for young people remaining with their carer family. The percentage for care home services may be a result of a sample of care homes providing short term care, possibly to children with disabilities. Overall, and given these observations, the data is positive.

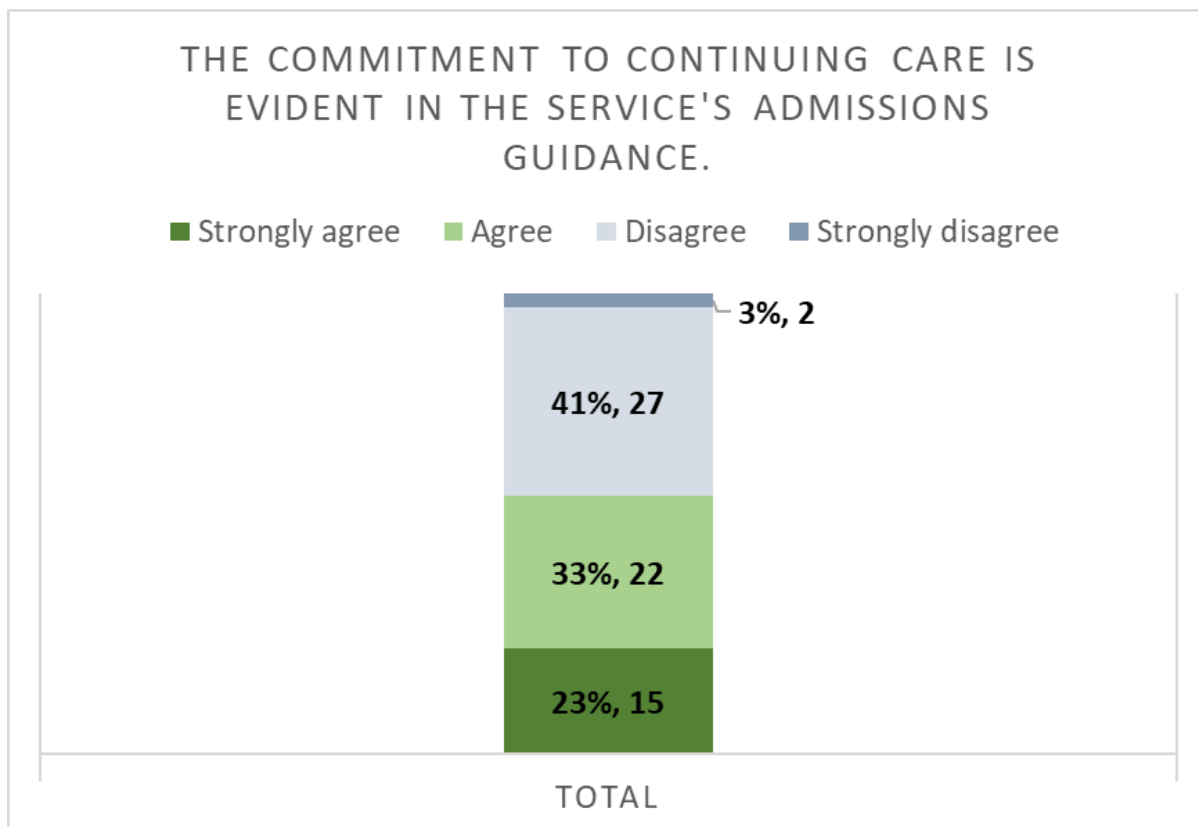
Practice example

Young people were supported to remain in their home for as long as they wanted and were supported to exercise their rights through the pro-active use of formal advocacy. When they moved on, it was within a timescale that was right for them and to services which were jointly assessed as providing what they needed. One young person in the house had already turned 21 and was in second year at university. There was no plan for them to move on at that time.

The commitment to continuing care is evident in the service's admissions guidance.

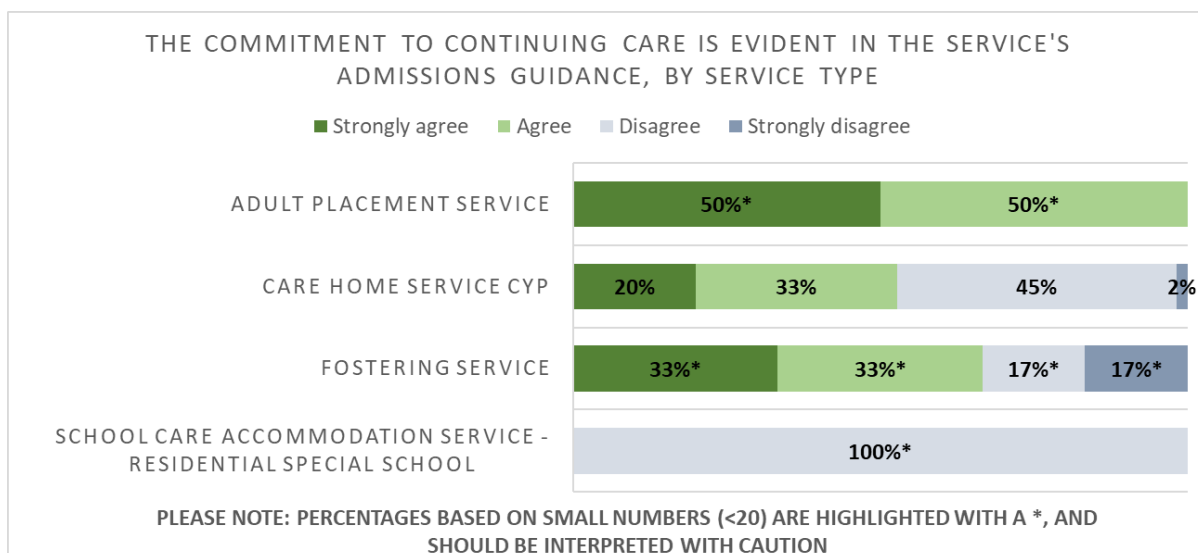
When considering admissions, services need to assess their capacity to meet the referred young person's needs into continuing care. This should reduce the risk of placement moves for children and young people and ensure that young people have a secure home for as long as they need it.

You can see our guidance on admissions [here](#).



Practice example

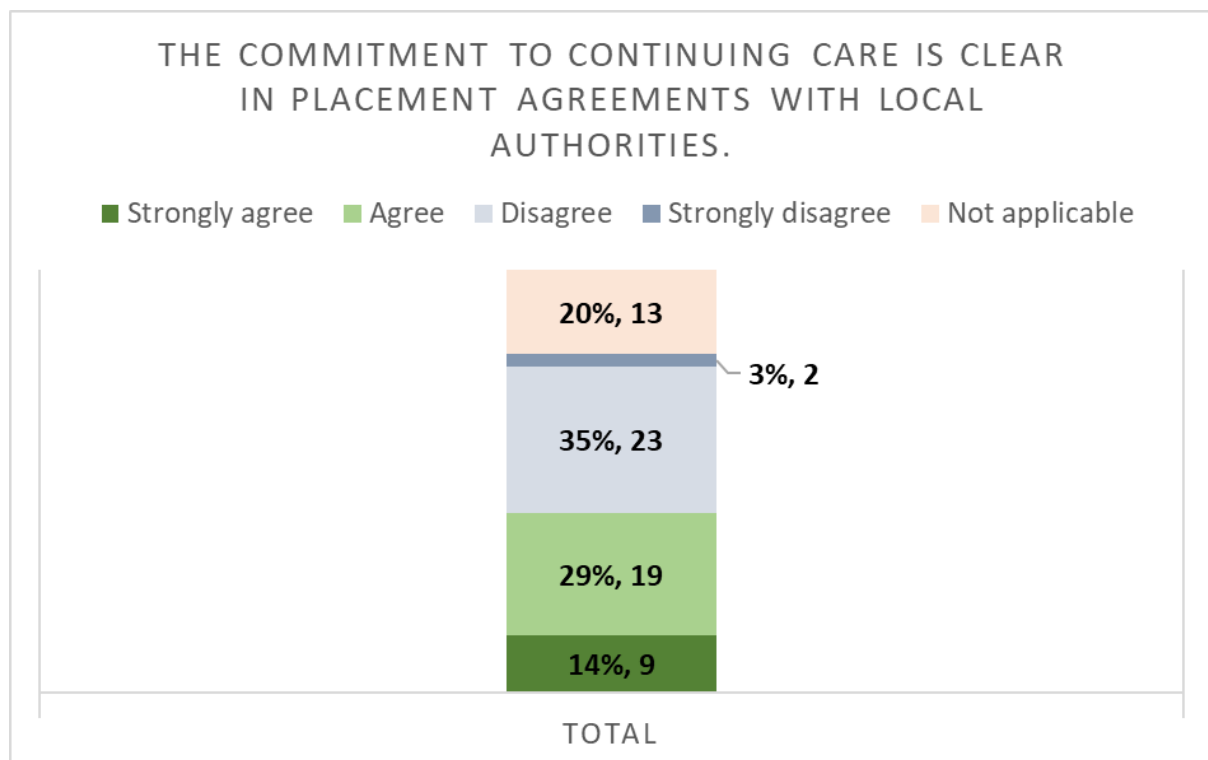
One young person was 21 years old and had been in the service for 10 years. The service was committed to ensuring their transition into independence was right for them and they felt supported, nurtured and safe. The young person was in full time employment, in a long-term relationship with their partner and was part of that family. The service was supporting the young person with driving lessons which would benefit their employment.



Our findings show that almost half of care homes in the sample need to improve their admissions guidance to reflect their commitment to continuing care. It is important that young people feel confident that they can remain in their home for as long as they need so that they can build nurturing and trustful relationships with caregivers who can support them into adulthood.

The commitment to continuing care is clear in placement agreements with local authorities.

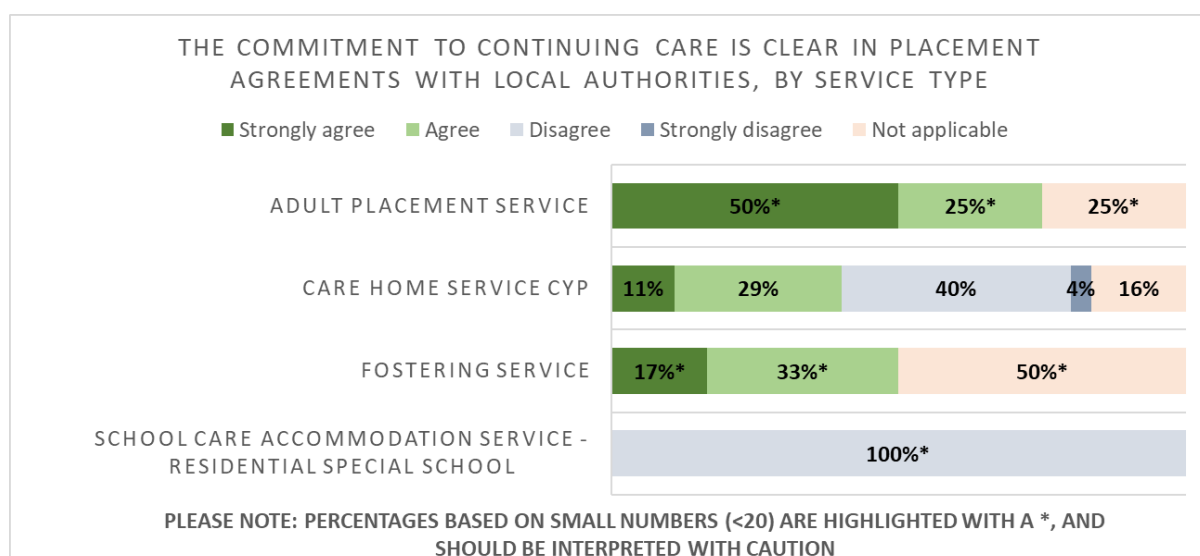
Placement agreements are another mechanism by which young people's right to continuing care is recognised, safeguarded, and hold both the provider and the local authority to account.



*Please note percentages in this table are rounded up.

Practice example

One young person was achieving well and progressing to moving to independence and accessing their own accommodation having decided they no longer wanted to stay in the service. The young person had achieved in college, gained employment, was taking driving lessons and enjoyed an active social life.



When analysing this data we need to take into account that 30% of our sample were local authority services, so service agreements would not be in place. However, the data suggests that, for care homes, there is room for improvement in making their commitment to continuing care clear in placement agreements.

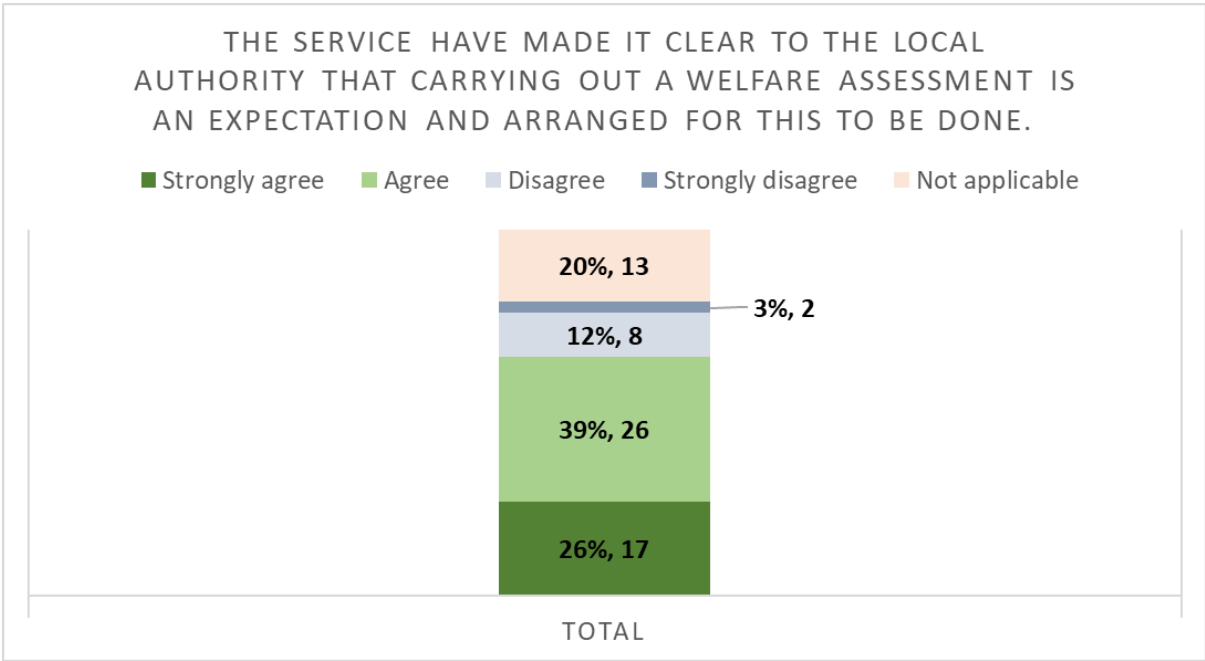
Practice example

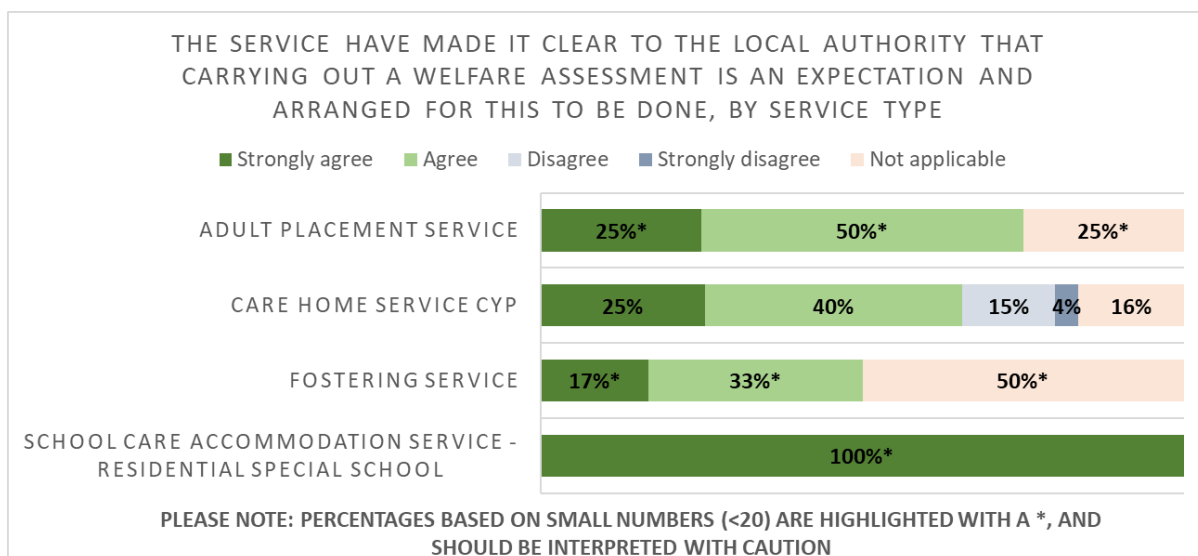
The supervising social worker for one young person was concerned that local authority planning for a young person who had turned 16 was not progressing. The local authority was happy to continue to fund the placement but began to talk about supported accommodation options for when the young person turned 18 and left school.

The service has made it clear to the local authority that carrying out a welfare assessment is an expectation and arranged for this to be done.

Key contributors to ensuring that continuing care becomes a positive reality for children and young people include early, effective and pro-active communication. Shared decision-making between partners with responsibility for meeting the continuing care rights and needs of young people is crucial.

A welfare assessment is a key driver to ensure this occurs. This assessment, which must meet the requirements of [The Continuing Care \(Scotland\) Order 2015](#), must be undertaken as soon as reasonably practicable before a young person in a care service ceases to be looked after by the local authority. We encourage these assessments to take place prior to the young person turning 16. This is so that they have sufficient time to consider options and are supported by the people who know them well and with whom they have developed good relationships. The Care Inspectorate, CELCIS and Clan Childlaw produced a [guidance note](#) relating to continuing care and welfare assessments.





Our findings show most services in the sample were proactive in ensuring welfare assessments were undertaken by local authorities.

Practice example

The service recently contacted the placing social worker for a 15-year-old young person to request when a welfare assessment and pathways planning would begin. The placing social worker responded to say that this would take place in the coming year now the young person had turned 15. The service had included this in the young person's care plan and was to continue to advocate for this to be undertaken.

Practice example

A local authority did not carry out a welfare assessment until the young person was transferred from the children's team social worker to the throughcare and after care team at the age of 18. This did not follow guidance and significantly increased the risk of the young person not being fully informed and supported about important rights and options.

Conclusion

It is reassuring that the young people in our sample who remained in continuing care were, overall, experiencing good outcomes. This supports evidence from the research, quoted in this report, that when an environment is safe, supportive and where there are meaningful relationships, young people's transition into adulthood can be more positive. We saw many examples of young people achieving in various aspects of their lives and these achievements being celebrated.

There is, however, still potential for more young people to experience the support of continuing care. Services and local authorities must continue to apply the principles and guidance around continuing care to ensure that young people's right to remain in their home, for as long as they want to, is upheld.

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