

Removing practical barriers to using the Setting Up Home Allowance

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council and Coram Voice

In April 2023, Coram Voices' **A National Voice (ANV)**, England's national children in care council, launched the '**Grand Campaign**' focusing on the **Setting Up Home Allowance** after the Government announced it was increasing the amount from £2000 to £3000. Care-experienced young people reported that support varied widely across the country: They were receiving different amounts, often lacked clarity about what the allowance could be used for, and were unsure how to access it. In response, ANV produced a **report** containing local and national recommendations aimed at improving both policy and practice.

Following this, Coram Voice invited local authorities to engage in more detailed work across 2025. They provided online sessions for local authorities to come together with care leavers, one-to-one catch-ups, guidance, and conversation tools to support consultation with their own young people. The aim was not to impose a single solution, but to help Local Authorities explore how the allowance could work better for care leavers, drawing on lived experience.

Why Barnsley got involved

Barnsley's early conversations with care leavers showed the problem wasn't just the amount of money. Young people faced practical barriers: they couldn't spend their allowance directly because purchases had to go through a personal adviser with a procurement card, causing delays and missed deals. Experiences also varied by worker, as no clear process existed. Council rules preventing cash purchases further limited access to cheaper options like Facebook Marketplace.

Listening to young people and decision makers together

Barnsley involved young people in shaping change. Care leavers joined a Corporate Parenting Panel takeover, presenting real-life scenarios on balancing the Setting Up Home Allowance with everyday costs. They highlighted practical challenges, such as flooring and property conditions, and suggested improvements. Their feedback was used to create an action plan for the Corporate Parenting Operational Group.

Understanding the real problem

Discussions revealed a key issue: properties were often allocated with worn carpets removed, leaving homes technically ready but not practically liveable. Young people had to spend much of their Setting Up Home Allowance immediately on flooring, leaving little for essential household items. This meant starting independent living without basic furniture or equipment, affecting comfort, wellbeing, and whether the home felt welcoming.

Developing solutions

Rather than waiting for long-term policy changes, Barnsley focused on practical solutions to stretch the allowance immediately. Working with housing providers and local organisations, they reduced avoidable costs: care leavers could borrow a carpet cleaner to make some properties liveable without spending their allowance, and Berneslai Homes improved property conditions and provided suitable flooring where possible.

Partnering with Help Out Barnsley also gave access to affordable furniture and low-cost flooring, helping young people prioritise essential household items.

Rather than waiting for a long policy process, Barnsley focused on solutions that could improve young people's experiences immediately. The aim was to help the allowance stretch further in practice while longer-term changes were explored.

Wider improvements

The work led to wider changes beyond housing. Barnsley recognised that strict purchasing rules limited the allowance's effectiveness, as young people couldn't access cheaper second-hand items. Working with finance and corporate parenting teams, they introduced a controlled approach giving care leavers up to £300 in cash for small sellers or online marketplaces.

Additional support plans include a care leavers pantry for discounted food and a tool library, letting young people borrow rather than buy essential items.

Learning and reflections

Barnsley found many challenges were caused by systems, not funding. Spending restrictions created unintended barriers for young people.

Involving young people and corporate parents helped decision makers see the real impact of processes, showing that practical procedural changes can greatly improve the allowance's effectiveness.

What happens next

Barnsley views this work as an ongoing programme rather than a finished project. They are exploring a formal Setting Up Home Allowance policy for greater consistency, while continuing to monitor how changes are working in practice.

The service is also working with local retailers, housing providers, and partners to reduce costs and expand support, while refining the flexible funding approach to allow greater access within audit requirements.

Advice to other local authorities

Barnsley stressed the importance of early senior and corporate parenting support, especially for changes like flexible funding that required finance and auditor reassurance. Involving decision makers directly – such as through the Corporate Parenting Panel – helped them see the real-life impact of processes.

Focusing on practical barriers and collaborating across housing, finance, and corporate parenting teams enabled changes that made the allowance more effective in everyday life for young people.

To find out more, contact emma.hosking@coramvoice.org.uk.