



Local offer for Care Leavers

For decision For discussion For information

OWNER
Carolyn Connor

VERSION
Version 1

DATE
February 6, 2019

REVIEW DATE
February 6, 2020

© Brighter Futures for Children

Brighter Futures for Children
Civic Offices, Bridge Street,
Reading RG1 2LU

Company number 11293709

Contents

Introduction	5
The Leaving Care Service	6
Who can access support from the Leaving Care Service?	6
Key Words – Categories of Care Leavers	6
Eligible	6
Relevant	6
Former Relevant.....	6
Qualifying.....	6
Support up to 25	6
Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)	7
The Role of Social Workers	7
Support from a Personal Advisor	8
Contacting your Social Worker or Personal Advisor	8
Leaving Care Service Duty number: 01189 375320 (Leaving Care)	8
Prevention for Care Leavers at Risk of Offending.....	8
Adult Services	9
Safeguarding Care Leavers as Adults	9
Who to contact	9
Reading Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)	9
Pathway Planning	10
How will I be involved?	10
Who else will be involved?	10
When will my Pathway Plan be completed and reviewed?.....	10
Independent Skills Development	11
Leaving Care Support Service – Independence Skills Programme.....	11
Accommodation	12
Staying Put	12
Semi Independent Accommodation Options.....	12
Supported Lodgings	12
Semi-Independent Multi Occupancy	12
Reading Housing and Social Housing Providers.....	13
Council Tax Discount.....	13
Social Housing outside of Reading.....	13
Ensuring Suitable Accommodation.....	13

Accommodation Evaluation.....	14
Multi-Agency Accommodation Forum.....	14
Education, Training and Employment	14
Personal Education Plans (PEP).....	15
Education, Health Care Plan (EHCP).....	15
Brighter Futures for Children Virtual School Overview	16
Financial Entitlements	16
A guide to care leaver financial entitlements	16
Transport Allowance:.....	16
Birthday Allowance: (dependant on placement).....	16
Festival Allowance:.....	17
Housing Allowance: Needs led assessment	17
Leaving Care Grant:.....	17
Clothing Allowance:	18
Personal Allowance:.....	18
University and Higher Education	18
16 to 19 Bursary Fund:.....	19
Who can apply for a 16 to 19 Bursary Fund?.....	19
Bursaries for vulnerable groups.....	19
Discretionary bursary.....	20
Information for institutions	20
College Equipment:.....	20
Laptop:	21
Identification:.....	21
Sure Start Maternity Grant:	21
Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Care Leavers Joint Protocol	21
Post 18 Benefits	21
Bank Accounts.....	21
Health	22
Looked After Children’s Health Team	22
FRANK	22
Iris Reading.....	23
Sexual Health	24
Sexual Identity.....	24
Specialist (maternity and new parent support).....	25

Relationships.....	25
Participation in Society	25
Care Leavers Week.....	26
Reading Children in Care Council (CiCC)	26
Reconstruct Advocacy Service	26
Reconstruct Independent Visitors Scheme.....	26
NYAS Return Interviews for Missing Children Service	26
Access to Records	27
Can I see my file?	27
Exit Interviews.....	28
Complaints and compliments.....	28
Who can make a complaint, suggestion or compliment?	28
Who do you tell if you have a complaint, suggestion or compliment?	28
Useful Information	29
Childline	29
National Youth Advocacy Service	29
The Care Leavers Association.....	29



Introduction

The process of leaving care and transitioning to adult life can be a challenging and confusing time. This guide has been created to tell you about all the support that we have in Reading for you as a care leaver.

We know that it is a big step when you move out of care and start living on your own or with friends. Just because you are leaving care, or have already left care, we haven't stopped caring about you. We want to make sure that you feel safe and supported and know where and who to go to for advice and help.

Local care leavers have helped develop this guide. We will continue to listen to your views and to make sure the services we offer are what you need.

To be able to get the support set out in this guide, you must have been in care for a period of at least 13 weeks (or periods amounting to 13 weeks) which began after age 14 and included some time after your 16th birthday. If you are not sure whether you qualify for support, then please contact the Leaving Care Service.

Your Social Worker or Personal Adviser will talk with you about the information in this guide and can provide further copies on request.

This guide is also available online at:

<https://brighterfuturesforchildren.org/>

The Leaving Care Service

Who can access support from the Leaving Care Service?

In order to understand the type of support that you will receive from the Leaving Care Service you will need to understand some key words which are used to describe the 4 categories of Care Leaver. These key words and definitions are described below; if when you have read the key words you still need help in understanding them then you can discuss these with your Social Worker or Personal Advisor.

Key Words – Categories of Care Leavers

Eligible

You are an Eligible Care Leaver if...

- you are aged 16 or 17; and
- you are currently a young person in care, and
- you have been in care for a period of at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, which must include at least 1 day since your 16th birthday.

Relevant

You are a Relevant Care Leaver if....

- You are no longer cared for by the Local Authority but you have previously been an 'Eligible' care leaver and,
- You are 16 or 17 years old.

Former Relevant

You are a Former Relevant Care Leaver if...


- You are aged between 18 and 21 and before reaching 18 you were or had been a Relevant Care Leaver or immediately before you stopped being cared for you were an Eligible Care Leaver.
- If at the age of 21 and up to reaching the age of 25 where you continue or return to be in full time education or training then you can remain as a Former Relevant Care Leaver for the duration of the agreed programme.

Qualifying

You are a Qualifying Care Leaver if...

- You are at least 16 but under 21, and
- You were a cared for young person prior to the making of a Special Guardianship Order which was in force when you reached 18, or
- If at any time after you reached the age of 16 you were no longer looked after, or accommodated or,
- You were privately fostered and assessed to be in need.

Support up to 25



Following changes introduced through the Children & Social Work Act 2017, care leavers are now entitled to support from a Personal Adviser up to the age of 25, whether continuing in education or training or not. From the age of 21 all Former Relevant care leavers will continue to receive support if in agreement and having been assessed as having unmet needs within their Pathway Plan. Where involvement has ended care leavers can request a continuation of support up to the age of 25. A Pathway Plan will be undertaken and support will continue in line with any unmet needs.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

A UASC is defined as an individual who is under 18, who has arrived in the UK without a responsible adult, is not being cared for by an adult who by law or custom has responsibility to do so, is separated from both parents and has applied for asylum in the United Kingdom in his/her own right.

The local authority has a duty to assess such children under section 17, and then, almost always, to accommodate them under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.

Support will be provided to UASC to access legal representation in support of their initial asylum claim to remain in the United Kingdom. Care Leaver status as detailed above applies to all UASC who achieve Eligible Care Leaver status having been accommodated for 13 weeks from the age of 14 including 1 day since the age of 16.

Statutory guidance for local authorities can be found in 'Care of unaccompanied migrant children and child victims of modern slavery' - Department for Education, March 2017.

The Role of Social Workers

All Eligible Care Leavers will be allocated a Social Worker who will act as your lead worker and be responsible for the regular update of your Pathway Plan (see Pathway Planning). As an Eligible care leaver you will be jointly allocated to a Personal Advisor.

As an Eligible Care Leaver you will remain allocated to your Social Worker until you either leave care or reach 18 years of age. However you will remain allocated to your Personal Advisor whilst you continue to have a care leaver status, therefore this will be until you reach 21 years of age and possibly up to the age of 25 if you request a continued service and are assessed as having unmet needs.

If you are a young person who requires the support of an adult social worker because of additional needs such as disability or mental health issues will continue to receive support from your current Social Worker until you transition to Adult Services. The Leaving Care Service will allocate you a Personal Advisor from the age of 16 who will work alongside your existing Social Worker and later on your Adults Service's Worker to fully support your transition to adult hood

Support from a Personal Advisor

All Eligible, Relevant and Former Relevant Care Leavers will be allocated a Personal Advisor from the age of 16.

Your Personal Advisor will support you to develop the skills that will assist you to live independently at a time when you are ready to do so. A key role of the Personal Advisor is to provide and coordinate the support, advice and guidance you will need in support of your transition to adult life.

Contacting your Social Worker or Personal Advisor

Your Social Worker or Personal advisor will be introduced to you by your existing Social Worker. Your Personal Advisor will provide you with their telephone and email contact details. Alternatively they can be found at:

Leaving Care Service Duty number: 01189 375320 (Leaving Care)

The Leaving Care Service has a duty system to cover staff absence, if you are unable to contact your Social Worker or Personal Advisor and the matter is urgent you can request to speak to the Duty Worker.

If the matter is really urgent you can also request to speak directly to the Practice Manager or Team Manager.

The Leaving Care Service is open during normal office hours. If you need to speak to someone urgently outside of these hours you can contact the Reading Out of Hours Service. Support out of hours is limited to emergencies only:

Out of Hours Tel: 01344 786543

Prevention for Care Leavers at Risk of Offending

For young people who are moving into adulthood and have previously been in the care / criminal justice system this can be a turbulent time in terms of the risk they present to others as well as their safety and wellbeing.

As such it is vital that there is a clear plan to assist and manage these young people and that the Youth Offending Team practitioner and Leaving Care Social Worker or Personal Advisor will work together to promote independence and risk management.

Moving forward Leaving care workers will attend complex case panel forum's and planning meetings as relevant and it is the responsibility of the YOT practitioner to ensure that they are invited.

The YOT will provide an enhanced service for any care leavers who are deemed to be at risk of offending even if they have turned 18. These referrals will be made by the personal advisor to a YOT Manager. It is likely that intervention will be time limited to address any offending risks.

Adult Services

If you are a Care Leaver identified as having complex additional needs in relation to your transition to adult life your Social Worker will discuss with you and seek your consent to complete a referral to Adult Services. A member of the Transition Team will then work alongside your Social Worker or Personal Advisor to undertake an assessment of your needs which will identify your level of independence and your future support needs as provided by Adult Services.

Safeguarding Care Leavers as Adults

Reading Adult Safeguarding Board recognises that the abuse of adults is a reality. Reading Adult Safeguarding Board does not believe that this is acceptable and is committed to partnership working to prevent and stop both the risks and experience of abuse or neglect. Reading Adult Safeguarding Board will ensure that the safeguarding arrangements promote the adult's wellbeing and that staff in their organisations work with the adult to establish what being safe means to them and how best this can be achieved.

For more information visit: <http://www.reading.gov.uk/adultabuse>

Who to contact

Telephone 0118 937 3747 (Adult Care Team)

01344 786 543 (Emergency Duty Team - out of hours)

E-mail safeguarding.adults@reading.gov.uk

Website <http://www.reading.gov.uk/adultabuse>

Reading Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)

The MARAC is a public protection process that sits alongside Safeguarding Children, Safeguarding Adults and Multi-agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). It links also to the Integrated Offender Management (IOM) programme which includes a number of Domestic Abuse perpetrators.

The agencies attending the monthly MARAC meeting discuss adult victims who are facing the most dangerous situations of domestic abuse.

We discuss cases at the MARAC where the violence is between boyfriend and girlfriend, husband and wife, separated, divorced or living together or maybe, never having lived together.

We discuss violence in same sex relationships. The victim may be female or male. We help family members facing violence from someone else in their family.

The focus may be a victim of Forced Marriage or "honour" based abuse.

We aim to piece together a wide picture of the family situation to assess just who is at risk of violence, abuse and neglect.

We do not meet to discuss children primarily but we often highlight dangers facing children to help agencies to protect them. In some situations, we may discuss victims aged 16 – 17 years.

Pathway Planning

Pathway Plans will be prepared for all Eligible, Relevant and Former Relevant young people. From the age of 16 your Pathway Plan will replace your Care Plan. Your Pathway Plan is about your needs and what we all need to do to ensure your successful transition to adult life.

Your pathway plan is written by the local authority in consultation with you and important people in your life. It sets out your needs, views and future goals, and identifies exactly what support you will receive from us. We will review your pathway plan with you regularly so that it is kept up-to-date.

We will try to enable you to keep the same Personal Adviser, though this will not always be possible. The amount of support that you receive from your Personal Adviser will depend on what you want and your circumstances.

The Leaving Care Service will consider with you what extra support you may need. You might, for example, need extra support because:

- You have special educational needs or a disability.
- You are an unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child (UASC) and your immigration status is unclear.
- You are in or leaving custody or you have had contact with the criminal justice system;
- You are a young parent; or
- You are going through a difficult time in your personal life

How will I be involved?

For your Pathway Plan to be effective it will be based on an up to date needs assessment and will set out the support that you need to achieve your aspirations. We aim to fully involve you in the development of your Pathway Plan. You have a right to be involved in all decisions about your plans for leaving care. You also have the right to support from an independent advocate if you want to challenge any of the decisions about the support we give you (see Advocacy Services).

Who else will be involved?

With your agreement and where it is appropriate we will seek the views of your parents and carers, we will also seek the views from our partner agencies which may include; Housing, Education, Training and Employment providers, Job Centre, Health services, Youth Offending Services, Transition Support Service and others. Your Pathway Plan will seek to ensure that all agencies are working together to provide you with clear and consistent advice and support.

When will my Pathway Plan be completed and reviewed?

Your initial Pathway Plan will be completed before you are 16 years and 3 months old. If you are already over 16 on entering care of the Local Authority then your Pathway Plan will be completed within 3 months of your accommodation start date.

Your Pathway Plan will then be reviewed within every 6 months or within every 28 days of any significant change to your plan such as a change of address, significant health event or at your request.

As an Eligible Care Leaver your Pathway Plan will be written and available at your Statutory Review which will continue to be chaired by your Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). A Statutory Review must take place before making a decision to confirm that a young person is ready to leave care.

If you are a Relevant Care Leaver your Pathway Plan review meeting will be held within every 6 months or 28 days of a significant change. Your Pathway plan review will be undertaken by your Personal Advisor who will consult with you and when in-line with your wishes other important people and professionals.

If you are a Former Relevant Care Leaver your Pathway Plan will continue to be updated within every 6 months or 28 days of a change of address. Your Pathway plan review will be undertaken by your Personal Advisor who will consult with you and when in-line with your wishes other important people and professionals.

Independent Skills Development

Learning the necessary skills to live independently does not begin after you have left care, it begins when you are still in care, therefore young people will be encouraged to develop these skills in both their placements and via a range of support services.

Your Social Worker and Personal Advisor will support the assessment of your independence skills and will provide support, advice and guidance on a range of issues relating to leaving care including:

- Accessing Education, Employment and training
- Developing Independence skills
- Finding and managing suitable and secure accommodation
- Managing your finances and claiming benefits
- Support to access Health services including access to emotional and mental health support needs.

Your Social Worker or Personal Advisor will also help you to access specialist support when you need it, this may include counselling and advice services, issues relating to alcohol and drug use, sexual health, budgeting and benefits such as Universal Credit, Job Seekers Allowance, Income Support and Housing Benefit.

Your Social Worker or Personal Advisor will work with you to enable you to put into place the things in your life that will enable you to live independently in your own accommodation.

Leaving Care Support Service – Independence Skills Programme

Moving forward a full programme of independence skills sessions will be available to all Reading Care Leavers via the Leaving Care Service. Group work sessions will be accessible from Civic Centre in Reading. This service is planned to launch in May 2019 a full time table of sessions and how to

access them will be made available to all Care Leavers, the course will be run termly throughout the year.

Accommodation

You will be provided information on all the various accommodation pathways by your Social Worker and Personal Advisor. Your accommodation needs will be reviewed and will likely change over time as you continue towards adulthood. The ultimate aim is for you to be confident to manage your accommodation and to live as independently as possible.

Staying Put

Reading's pledge to Looked After Children includes our commitment to supporting young people to remain in their foster care placements beyond the age of 18 and up to the age of 21. This is irrespective of whether the foster carer is a Reading foster carer, Family and Friends foster carer or a foster carer from an independent fostering agency. Plans for Staying Put need to be discussed with all involved and agreed at a Pathway Plan review at the earliest opportunity. For more information on Staying Put arrangements and finances then please request information from your Social Worker or Personal Advisor.

Semi Independent Accommodation Options

Supported Lodgings is accommodation within a family home. The young person is provided with their own bedroom and must be engaged in education, employment or training. Support is provided informally by the host family. The young person is expected to make a contribution towards living costs and purchase their own food for lunches and evening meals.

Semi-Independent Multi Occupancy provisions in Reading are run by private providers; these properties usually accommodate between two and four care leavers and have support staff on site around the clock. The higher staffing ratio provides for more intense support to enable care leavers to engage with services and appointments as well as supporting the development of independence skills and occasional assistance with transport.

It is proposed that the Leaving Care Service provides **supported Social Housing tenancies** for the sole use of

Care Leavers, plans are well underway, and this accommodation will be for 16+ year olds and consists of dispersed one bed social housing tenancies within Reading. The Leaving Care Service will provide day time holistic floating support 7 days per week.

If you are successful in managing your tenancy the Leaving Care Service in collaboration with Housing will support you to transition to your own tenancy from 18.

We can also support access to commissioned semi-independent tenancies, however in this instance there is often less floating support available and therefore planning for this type of accommodation is usually reserved for older care leavers and as a step prior to full independence.

Reading Housing and Social Housing Providers

You will be offered support from your Personal Advisor to apply for Social Housing, you will need to be 18 and if assessed as tenancy ready your Personal Advisor will provide you with a supporting letter to support your application. You will need to provide Housing with a copy of your identification and you will need an active bank account for your application to be progressed.

As a Reading Care Leaver you will have priority Housing status and your Personal Advisor will be able to support you through the process.

Alternatively, you may wish to secure a **private let (with a private landlord)** but please be aware that the Local Authority cannot act as a Guarantor for any private rental arrangements, however, your Personal Advisor will be able to provide you with a reference if you're assessed as being tenancy ready and further information, advice and guidance on accessing Housing related financial support and benefits.

Council Tax Discount

Work is currently underway to present a proposal which will (if successful) provide all, careleavers with a Council Tax Discount who are aged between 18 and 25 .

Social Housing outside of Reading

You may need to provide evidence of a local connection if you wish to apply for Social Housing in another Local Authority. Your Personal Advisor will be able to provide you with advice, guidance and support throughout this process.

Information and advice on the level of support you require and further details of the accommodation options can be discussed with your Social Worker or Personal Advisor. Your Pathway Plan will detail your accommodation arrangements and the support that you can expect from the Local Authority, alongside information on organisations that provide support services that could help meet your accommodation needs.

Ensuring Suitable Accommodation

All Care Leavers will be offered advice, guidance and support from their Personal Advisor when planning a change of address. Personal Advisors will offer to support viewings and undertake an assessment of the property (Schedule 2, volume 3 Children Act 1989) This assessment of the property will primarily seek to ensure the care leavers safety and will also make recommendations in relation to suitability, highlighting any issues that need addressing and advice on who to contact for works and in case of emergency.

Accommodation Evaluation

When you leave any commissioned accommodation (16 to 18) you will be asked by your Social Worker or Personal Advisor to complete an accommodation evaluation form. The accommodation evaluation form will seek your views on the accommodation you have just left, covering areas such as personal safety, location, staff etc. This is a very important for you to complete because it will take into account your experiences of the accommodation. From this evaluation we can progress any concerns you may have experienced with the accommodation provider and equally promote areas of the accommodation which has been positive for you.

Multi-Agency Accommodation Forum

If you are a Care Leaver identified as requiring a planned accommodation move then your Social Worker or Personal Advisor will be able to represent your wishes and needs at a monthly multi-agency accommodation forum

The forum invites representatives from Reading Housing, Social Housing Providers, and Children's Commissioning Services to meet with the Leaving Care Service. The Local Authority arranges the panel to enable us to undertake joined up planning and to be better able to promote care leavers needs with our partner agencies and to also prioritise our accommodation options to ensure that we have suitable accommodation available that meets all of our care leavers needs.

Education, Training and Employment

An offer for all – Adviza

Adviza provides careers information, advice and guidance services for young people aged 13-19 years or up to 25 for those with a special educational need or disability Adviza are dedicated to helping young people get on the right track and to fulfil their potential.

The team are highly skilled and can provide you with:

- Up to date information about career pathways and the labour market
- Details of apprenticeships and traineeships
- Information about college courses and university degrees
- Support in completing application forms and developing a CV
- Discretionary financial support with bus fares
- Support to decide on the best career path for your future

Adviza is Reading's service to promote and support engagement and access for all Reading's Care Leavers. With training employment solutions, Brighter Futures for Children remains committed to ensuring all of our care leavers have access to a local apprenticeships and aim to go further in identifying a broader range of provisions and support services via education and training pathways.

As corporate parents we aim to provide a bespoke offer to all of our care leavers, ensuring those who are struggling to access education and training are provided with the help they need through to a full range of opportunities including work experience, study programmes, supported internships,

traineeships, apprenticeships and support to access further and higher education. We will ensure that all of our care leavers can access a readily available pathway in line with their ability and aspirations.

In Reading we have very high aspirations for our care leavers, we aim to support them to achieve all of their goals and aspirations and we are absolutely committed to ensuring they have access to all the support and opportunities they need to secure their future prosperity and well-being.

Whatever support you need to make an informed decision Adviza can help you plan and make the best choices for your future.

Reading Office

Reading

Elevate Reading Hub, 3rd Floor, Reading Central Library,
Abbey Square, Reading RG1 3BQ
Tel: 0118 937 2204
Email: reading@adviza.org.uk

Support for NEET and at risk of NEET year 12 & 13 cohort and 16-24 year olds in a vulnerable group.
Drop in service Tuesday and Thursday, between 12pm and 5pm.

Personal Education Plans (PEP)

All Eligible Care Leaver's will be supported with regular Personal Education Plan's (PEPs). PEP's are an integral part of the Pathway Plan and remain a statutory document to be updated termly.

The PEP should reflect the importance of a personalised approach to learning which secures good basic skills, stretches aspiration and builds life chances.

The PEP must record SMART targets, which are key to releasing Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) funding. The targets need to be agreed with the child/young person; PEPs will detail achievements, attendance, SEND, behavioural issues and any extra-curricular activities.

The PEP must give details of who will take the plan forward, specify timescales for action and review and identify funding sources for implementing the plan e.g. Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) or 16-19 Bursary that all Care Leavers are entitled to.

Education, Health Care Plan (EHCP)

An EHC plan identifies a child's special educational needs, and where relevant, brings together education, health and care services to achieve agreed outcomes. An EHC plan will only be written for an eligible child on the completion of a SEND needs assessment.

Children, young people and families are at the centre of the assessment and planning process and this should be reflected in the EHC plan. The focus is very much on what is important for the child or young person – what they want to achieve now and in the future.

Your EHC plan will be reviewed by the local authority a minimum of every twelve months. These reviews will focus on your progression towards achieving the outcomes specified in you plan. The review will also consider whether the outcomes and supporting targets remain appropriate.

Brighter Futures for Children Virtual School Overview

Brighter Futures for Children Virtual School works to ensure that the education of our children and young people in care is of an exceptional standard. We aim for learners to have access to high quality, personalised and aspirational learning opportunities and strive to ensure they receive this.

The Virtual School is not, as the name suggests, a physical school. It is a team of teachers and professionals working alongside nurseries, schools and colleges to ensure that our children and young people receive a quality provision via all partnerships

We aim to close the educational gap between children who are looked after and their peers who are not, alongside reducing rates of exclusions and persistent absence.

We work directly with children and young people in their placements. We support schools directly and indirectly in collaboration with children's social care teams and social workers to provide a team of professionals putting the child or young person and their needs at the centre of decision making and planning.

We are in the process of establishing a Virtual College to promote the achievement of our care leavers and securing them aspirational routes into further education, University or quality training and pathways into employment.

We report to **Brighter Futures for Children** Corporate Parenting Board and the Education Achievement and Improvement Board. The Head teacher is a member of National Association of Virtual School Heads and a member of South East School Heads.

Financial Entitlements

A guide to care leaver financial entitlements

Transport Allowance:

Up to weekly bus pass rate (dependant on placement)

Eligible, Relevant and Former Relevant Care Leavers living in semi-independent and independent accommodation who are in education, employment or training, provided they are not entitled to travel expenses through their college or employer and are not within a reasonable distance from their college or work place are entitled to the current weekly bus pass rate per week.

Birthday Allowance: (dependant on placement)

16 or 17 - £50

18 - 21 - £50

22 - 25 - £25

(£20 postal order and remainder to be saved for on release if in custody).

All Eligible, Relevant and Former Relevant Care Leavers up to and including their 21st Birthday when living in semi-independent, independent accommodation or living with family members are entitled to a birthday allowance or gift equivalent as above. If serving a remand or custodial sentence you will receive a £20 postal order.

Whilst under 18 and as an Eligible or Relevant Care Leavers you cannot claim Universal Credit. If you are not in employment your Personal Advisor can support you to make an initial benefit claim on your 18th Birthday. Once your claim has been made you will receive weekly support until receipt of your first benefits payment as follows:

- First 5 weeks at £60.00
- Following 5 weeks:
- Semi Independent- £15 food voucher and £10 utilities
- Own tenancy -£15 food voucher and £15 utilities
- Supported Lodgings or extended family (not parents) - £25
- Supported Living Accommodation - £15 food voucher
- Thereafter food parcels or referral to local food banks will be offered.

If experiencing hardship then please contact your Personal Advisor at the earliest opportunity. Your Personal Advisor will be able to support you to complete a budget plan and can advise on accessing support from Job Centre Plus and the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Festival Allowance:

16 or 17 - £100

18-21 - £25 or gift equivalent

(£20 postal order and remainder to be saved for on release if in custody)

All Eligible, Relevant and Former Relevant Care Leavers up to 21years old when living in semi-independent, independent accommodation or living with family members are entitled to a festival allowance or gift equivalent as set out above. Festival allowance can be paid in accordance with festival dates of your choosing,

i.e. Christmas, Eid or Hanukkah etc. If serving a remand or custodial sentence you will receive a £20 postal order and the remaining balance will be saved for you on release.

Housing Allowance: Needs led assessment

To be assessed on an individual basis and requiring authorisation by the Head of Service.

Leaving Care Grant:

Up to £2000 - Needs Led Assessment

Relevant and Former Relevant Care Leavers will be supported with up to £2000 towards setting up home. Agreement is required from your Personal Advisor for use of your Leaving Care Grant prior to purchasing any items. Wherever possible your Personal Advisor will arrange payment and delivery. If you plan to leave a supported living arrangement after the age of 21 your Leaving Care Grant will remain available to you for a maximum of 12 months after your 21st birthday (or 12 months after you have left University over the age of 21).

Clothing Allowance:

Up to £75 every 3 months – Needs led Assessment

All Eligible and Relevant Care Leavers in semi-independent accommodation are entitled to a clothing allowance as set out above. Agreement must be provided from your Personal Advisor prior to any purchase.

Personal Allowance:

£60.00 weekly

All Eligible and Relevant Care Leavers living semi- independently will receive Personal Allowance.

Wherever possible this will be paid directly in to your bank account, however if you are not in education, training or employment and when it is accessible you will be required to attend Civic Offices for your payments as scheduled by your Personal Advisor.

Whilst under 18 and as an Eligible or Relevant Care Leavers you cannot claim Universal Credit. If you are not in employment your Personal Advisor can support you to make an initial benefit claim on your 18th Birthday. Once your claim has been made you will receive weekly support until receipt of your first benefits payment as follows:

- First 5 weeks at £60.00
- Following 5 weeks:
- Semi Independent- £15 food voucher and £10 utilities
- Own tenancy -£15 food voucher and £15 utilities
- Supported Lodgings or extended family (not parents) - £25
- Supported Living Accommodation - £15 food voucher
- Thereafter food parcels or referral to local food banks will be offered.

If experiencing hardship then please contact your Personal Advisor at the earliest opportunity. Your Personal Advisor will be able to support you to complete a budget plan and can advise on accessing support from Job Centre Plus and the Citizens Advice Bureau.

University and Higher Education

We have a dedicated Higher Education Personal Advisor to support you in every aspect of your Higher Education and University pathway, from supporting your UCAS application through to when you complete your studies.

The Leaving Care Service will fund the cost of student accommodation for the duration of all undergraduate studies. Accommodation will need to be assessed as in line with standard university accommodation for the area. Care Leavers in Higher Education will be provided up to £250 per year

towards books and equipment and additional help towards travel costs in term time. Care Leavers in Higher Education will also be supported to secure suitable accommodation during non-term time.

All Care Leavers in Higher Education will receive a bursary of £2000.

£500 - 1st Year

£500 - 2nd Year

£1000 - 3rd year

Any additional years study will not receive bursary payments as total amount capped at £2000.

Payments will be made in the June of each academic year; evidence of progression will be required prior to payments being made.

Payments will be made to support Graduation costs up to £150

All entitlements are subject to change and remain discretionary.

16 to 19 Bursary Fund:

Up to £1,200. Paid via the education provider in weekly instalments.

The 16 to 19 Bursary Fund is to support 16 to 19 year olds who are the most financially disadvantaged and those who most need help with the costs of staying in education.

Students aged over 19 can apply for the discretionary bursary if they have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or are continuing on a course they started aged between 16 and 18 (a '19+ continuer').

Who can apply for a 16 to 19 Bursary Fund?

The 16 to 19 Bursary Fund provides financial support to help students overcome specific barriers to participation so they can remain in education.

There are 2 types of 16 to 19 bursaries:

- bursaries for defined vulnerable groups of up to £1,200 a year
- discretionary bursaries which institutions award to meet individual needs, for example, help with the cost of transport, meals, books and equipment

Bursaries for vulnerable groups

Students in one or more of the groups below can apply for a bursary of up to £1,200.

Institutions do not receive an allocation of funds for bursaries for vulnerable groups. They draw down the funds by submitting a funding claim form via the [Student Bursary Support Service \(SBSS\) portal](#).

The defined vulnerable groups are students who are:

- in care

- care leavers
- receiving Income Support, or Universal Credit because they are financially supporting themselves or financially supporting themselves and someone who is dependent on them and living with them such as a child or partner
- receiving Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payments in their own right as well as Employment and Support Allowance or Universal Credit in their own right

Institutions must verify that young people meet the criteria for the bursary for vulnerable groups.

Funding claims for bursaries for vulnerable groups in the 2018 to 2019 academic year are available online from August 2018 via the [SBSS portal](#).

Discretionary bursary

Discretionary bursaries are awards made by institutions to individual students. They are designed to overcome the individual barriers to participation a student faces.

Institutions decide which students get a discretionary bursary and how much they will get. However, they should target students who cannot stay in education without financial help for things such as:

- Transport
- Meals
- Books
- Equipment

Institutions should assess the help each student needs on an individual basis and not make blanket or flat rate payments to all students.

Information for institutions

We have published information to help institutions which includes:

- the [16 to 19 Bursary Fund guide for the 2018 to 2019](#) academic year. The guide provides an overview of the general rules and principles underpinning the use of the fund
- an [audit guide](#) to help local authorities gain assurance that institutions are administering the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund correctly

there is also a [Young people's guide to the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund](#)

College Equipment:

Discretionary Payment up to £200 – Needs led assessment

If the care leaver's bursary (above) is unable to be accessed, all Eligible, Relevant and Former Relevant Care Leavers may be able to access up to £200 towards college equipment based on a needs led assessment and agreement from the Service Manager.

Laptop:

All Care Leavers in Education or Training are entitled to a laptop, need to be evidenced in a Personal Education Plan or Pathway Plan – Discretionary payment requires Head of Service agreement.

All Eligible, Relevant and Former Relevant Care Leavers are entitled to a Laptop to support their regular attendance in education or training; this is a discretionary payment and requires Deputy Director agreement.

Identification:

Passport, Driving Licence or Travel Document

Social Workers are to ensure that all Looked after Children have a passport. The Leaving Care Service will ensure all Eligible, Relevant and Former Relevant Care Leavers have a current Passport or Provisional Driving Licence as a means of identification. All Care Leavers will be supported to open a current bank account.

Sure Start Maternity Grant:

All Care Leavers who are expectant mothers will be supported to complete a Sure Start Maternity Grant form where they can access up to £500 towards unborn child's needs.

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Care Leavers Joint Protocol

A joint working protocol with DWP has been developed to ensure all Care leavers in Reading are able to make timely benefits claims and have access to a dedicated Personal Advisors at Job Centre Plus. By closely working alongside the DWP, the Leaving Care Service are seeking to avoid Care Leavers receiving benefit sanctions and with the main aim of ensuring our Care Leavers can access and engage in Education, Employment and Training.

As part of our working protocol with DWP, you may be able to receive financial support for clothing and shoes for job interviews. If you wish to see the DWP Joint Protocol in full or require further information please ask your Social Worker or Young Person's Support and Advice Worker.

Post 18 Benefits

Care leavers may be able to apply for a range of state benefits and allowances. Some benefits, but not all of them such as Personal Independence Payment (PIP) will be taken into account when calculating the level of financial support that you receive from the Leaving Care Service. Your Personal Advisor will help you to claim any benefits and allowances that you are entitled to receive.

Bank Accounts

As a Care Leaver you will be supported to open a bank account by your Social Worker or Personal Advisor who will ensure you have the necessary ID and a supporting letter in order for you to do this. A payment schedule of your entitlements will be confirmed prior to entitlements being paid

directly in to your account. The Local Authority may choose to make direct cash payments to you where there are concerns around budgeting or risky behaviours.

Payments can be made to all high street banks and we recommend you shop around for the best offer when identifying a bank, we also strongly recommend you consider opening an account

Health

Looked After Children's Health Team

The Looked after Children's Health Team are responsible for coordinating the health of looked after children 0 – 18

Please do not hesitate to contact us on the below contact numbers if you need any support.

Sharon Hickson

Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

TEL: 07736 890206

Email:sharon.hickson@berkshire.nhs.uk

Below are some of the ways your Leaving Care Service and your personal adviser can support you to stay healthy and look after your physical and mental health. We can:

- Give you information on healthy living
- Give you information on getting help to pay for prescriptions
- Support you to register with a GP
- Support you to move from CAMHS to adult services
- Give you information about counselling services that are available locally
- Give you help with transport costs when attending health appointments
- If you are a young parent, we will support you to do the best for them.
- We will help you arrange childcare, if this is what you want.
- Offer free or subsidised access to the leisure centres we run
- Give you information about health drop-in centres
- The Looked After Children's Nurse will work with you to develop
- a 'health passport' containing key information from your childhood
- (for example, when and if you have had immunisations) and your current
- health needs.

FRANK

FRANK is a confidential, anonymous, discreet and well-informed ready to offer advice, information and support on drug issues. The helpline is 24 hours a day and the number won't show up on your phone bill. You can talk to FRANK in 120 languages - a translator will be on hand if you need one when you ring.

Tel: 0800 77 66

Text: 0800 917 8765

Web: www.talktofrank.com

Iris Reading

Iris Reading is an adult drug and alcohol service available to anyone aged 18 and over, living in Reading

Services offered: Immediate health treatment Advice and information

- Harm reduction; overdose prevention
- Blood-borne viruses awareness
- Needle exchange
- Assessment and referral
- Support groups
- Drug and alcohol education
- Peer support
- Detoxification
- Substitute prescribing
- One to ones
- Testing and vaccinations (blood-borne viruses and STDs)
- Hep C treatment and support
- Training and voluntary work
- Individual aftercare support
- Aftercare groups and activities
- Access to mutual aid
- SMART Recovery
- Wellbeing and life skills
- Sports and exercise
- Music and arts
- Literacy and numeracy
- Housing support

Iris Reading

127 Oxford Road
RG1 7UY Reading
United Kingdom

Phone: 0118 955 7333

Email: reading@irispartnership.org.uk

Sexual Health

Safe Sex Berkshire is a new website available from [NHS](#) Berkshire which looks at all aspects of sex and keeping healthy, including: Sexual Health Matters (STD's), Contraception (also emergency), Test Kits for HIV & Chlamydia, Pregnancy, Sex & Relationships, Gender Identity, Consent, Keeping Safe and details of local services available for young people. www.safesexberkshire.nhs.uk

Family Planning Reading Sexual Health, Contraceptive and Family Planning Advice, Unit 21a Craven Road, Reading.

[Florey Sexual Health Clinic](#)

The Family Planning Association provides information and advice. www.fpa.org.uk

Brook provides advice and practical help with contraception and pregnancy testing, advice on planned and unplanned pregnancies.

Sexual Identity

Childline: Part of your sexual identity might involve working out if you are attracted to boys, girls, or both. It is normal for young people to become aware of their emotional and sexual feelings at different times. www.childline.org.uk

ReachOUT is Readings LGBT's youth provision

ReachOUT is also the Youth Club in Reading for young people (aged 13-19, or up to 25 if they have a Learning Difficulty or Disability) who are LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual or Transgender, or Questioning).

The club is held every Wednesday in a town-centre location, from 7-9pm, and provides a safe space for young people to come along, participate in fun activities and events, and meet other young people in a similar situation to themselves. They can also receive support from the volunteers and staff at the club on a range of issues they would like help with.

ReachOUT has also developed good links with other groups of LGBTQ young-people in the South-East, so you will have the chance to meet young people from other areas.

ReachOUT is really keen to hear from any LGBTQ young people living in the Reading area, so please get in touch!

Supportu: A support service for those needing help with LGBT issues based in the Thames Valley. <http://supportu.org.uk>

Specialist (maternity and new parent support)

Is a specialist maternity service for first-time young mums and vulnerable woman helping them have a healthy pregnancy, improve their child's health and development and plan their own futures. The team can work in partnership with mum and a specialist worker (health visitor, substance misuse worker) who will visit on a regular basis from early pregnancy to beyond birth.

By focusing on their strengths, the team aim to:

- Support the mum to be to develop good relationships with and understand the needs of their child
- Make choices that will give their child the best possible start in life
- Believe in themselves and their ability to succeed

Whitley Childrens centre Hub

252 Northumberland Avenue

Reading

RG2 7QA

Tel: 011 8 937 3894 220161 34

Relationships

As well as support from a Personal Adviser, we may be able to offer you additional practical and emotional support, such as through:

- Help to maintain or regain contact with people special to you or who cared for you in the past, like former foster carers, Independent Visitors or Social Workers.
- Support to re-connect with family where it is in your best interests.

Participation in Society

We want our care leavers to be active members of society, and to have all the chances in life that other young adults have. We can help you participate in society in the following ways:

- Providing information on groups and clubs you may wish to join
- Informing you about relevant awards, schemes and competitions you can enter, in line with your talents and interests
- Encouraging and helping you to enrol on the Electoral Register, so you can vote in elections
- Informing you about voluntary work that we think you may be interested in
- Informing and possibly helping with the cost of leisure activities
- Giving you advice and helping you to challenge any discrimination you face as a care leaver.

Care Leavers Week

Every October we celebrate our Care Leavers with a week of fun activities and engagement opportunities. There will be opportunities to engage in local activities for example Bowling, Cinema, Go-karting and Snowboarding. We welcome suggestions from our care leavers for future activities.

We also use this time to promote Education, Employment and Training opportunities and have held successful events targeting engagement. We also undertake consultation throughout Care Leavers week and will seek your views towards our on-going service development.

Please ask your Personal Advisor or Social Worker for further details.

Reading Children in Care Council (CiCC)

The Children in Care Council (CiCC) is a group of young people who are aged between 11 and 16 who meet every two weeks. They raise issues that impact those in care, and as a result help to shape service delivery. The CiCC is a statutory requirement for young people in care, to have their voices heard loud and clear by decision makers. The CiCC is represented at Corporate Parenting Board.

Reconstruct Advocacy Service

This service supports Care Leavers aged up to 19years old (Although where there is capacity will consider support up to the age of 21). Reconstruct Advocacy Service will:

- Raise issues and concerns about things care leavers are unhappy about
- Understand what is happening in their lives
- Make their views and wishes known
- Exercise choice about their lives
- Support making a complaint

Reconstruct Independent Visitors Scheme

This service supports care leavers up to 18 years of age to have an Independent Visitor (adult volunteer) who offers support through regular participation in a range of positive, fun activities together.

Unit 37 Easton Business Centre
Felix Road
Bristol
BS5 0HE
01895 549910

<http://reconstruct.co.uk/childrens-services/>

NYAS Return Interviews for Missing Children Service

This service supports care leavers up to 19 years of age to complete missing from home interviews by:

- Talking about what is happening in their lives, sharing the things that matter and the reasons for running away
- Identifying ways to keep safe and understanding what needs to change to make this happen
- Helping them to understand what happens now they have returned and to recognise the support services available.

Access to Records

All care leavers can request access to their records as held by Children's Social Care. All care leavers making a formal request for access to their records will be asked to put the request in writing and your Social Worker or Personal Advisor will be able assist in doing this if necessary.

When an application has been received from a care leaver, the request will be acknowledged promptly and in writing, or other appropriate forms of communication if required. The care leaver will be informed about the process and procedure, timescales for dealing with such requests and the services that the authority is able to provide.

An acknowledgement should be sent to the care leaver within ten working days, confirming that records exist. If the authority knows that the care records do not exist, we will seek to ensure no delay when informing you of this.

Your Social Worker needs to keep a record of your health, education, family members and placement arrangements etc. so in the future you can look back and see what has happened to you and have a record of your time in care. If you have a change of worker your new worker can look at your file to find out about you.

Your Social Worker and Personal Advisor will take notes of their visits with you and meetings about you. We also keep notes on how we work with you so we can see how we need to improve. In Reading all records are kept on an electronic case file system. This is a secure database and only workers who have been provided security access can view your files. This ensures your records remain confidential.

Can I see my file?

Yes, the law says you have a right to see personal information held about you unless we think it would be emotionally harmful to you (before you are 18) . If we decide you cannot see your records then your Social Worker will explain why to you. When you are 18 you will be able to see all of the records kept in relation to you, and your Social Worker or personal advisors will talk to you about what support you will need to read and understand the papers. There may be circumstances in which reading your file even as an adult may be upsetting for you and this will be discussed as part of the access request.

Exit Interviews

Work is underway to ensure that 6 months prior to your 21st (or 25 and still require a service) birthday you will be asked by your Personal Advisor to complete an Exit Interview Questionnaire. This can be completed in isolation or with the support of an impartial professional. The Exit Interview will seek your views on your entire journey through the Leaving Care Service, covering aspects such as education, accommodation support and post 21 planning. Your feedback into this document is vitally important to us to ensure that we continue to review progress and improve services for you.

Complaints and compliments

Who can make a complaint, suggestion or compliment?

If you receive a service from Brighter Futures for Children you can make a complaint, suggestion or compliment about that service.

What might you make a complaint, suggestion or compliment about?

You can make a complaint if you are unhappy with the way you are being treated and the services you are receiving. For example:

- if something has happened at your foster placement, or
- if you feel you do not get enough support from your Social Worker or Personal Advisor

If you think that something about the service you receive could be improved, you may want to make a suggestion. For example:

- you may want more information about your rights in care, or
- you may want to be more involved in the planning of your care.

Alternatively, you may want to make a compliment about a service you have received. For example, if you are happy about something your Social Worker or Personal Advisor has done for you, or if you feel happy with your foster care placement.

Who do you tell if you have a complaint, suggestion or compliment?

The Team Manager and Practice Manager are happy to meet with you and listen to any complaints, suggestions or compliments. The contact details for the team manager and practice manager are advertised in the Leaving Care Service office notice board in the reception area.

You should contact your Social Worker or Personal Advisor; however, if for any reason you are not able to tell your Social Worker, then you can contact the Complaints Manager.

Social Care Complaints Civic Offices
Bridge Street
Reading
RG1 2LU

Tel: 0118 937 2905 Ext:73748

And

Leaving Care Service Civic Offices
Bridge Street
Reading
RG1 2LU

Tel: 0118 937 2905

Useful Information

Childline

Get help and advice about a wide range of issues, talk to a counsellor on line or give them a call:

Tel: 0800 1111

Web: www.childline.org.uk

National Youth Advocacy Service

The National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) is a UK charity providing children's rights and socio-legal services. NYAS offer information, advocacy, legal representation and advice to children and young people up to the age of 25 through a network of advocates throughout England and Wales.

If you are a child, young person, or ringing on behalf of a child, young person or vulnerable adult and need help, information or advice please contact the Freephone helpline:

Tel: 0300 330 3131

Email: help@nyas.net

If you would like to speak with someone about a legal matter relating to an individual please speak to our legal team:

Tel: 0151 649 8700

Email: legal@nyas.net

The Care Leavers Association

The Care Leavers Association provides advice and information and a range of useful information about leaving care and your rights and entitlements.

Local Government Ombudsman PO Box 4771

Coventry CV4 0EH

Tel: 01904 380 200 Email: enquiries.york@lgo.org.uk Web: www.careleavers.com/leavingcare