

West Berkshire Council's
Local Offer to our Care Leavers



This document outlines the support that West Berkshire Council offers to our care leavers. It sets out the statutory entitlements that we must provide, as well as the additional help, support, advice and guidance that West Berkshire Council believes we should provide to our care leavers.

We have made a commitment to you as your corporate parents

We fully support the corporate parenting principles introduced by the Government that require *all departments* within a local authority to recognise their role as corporate parents, and encourage them to look at the support and services they provide. The principles require corporate parents:

- to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people
- to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
- to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
- to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
- to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
- for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
- to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

We know that sometimes things don't work out straight away. You may make choices you regret or find things are much harder than you imagined. This is all part of growing up and we will offer you a 'second chance' if you need it



We are committed to supporting you to prepare for and successfully move onto independence in all areas of life.

1. Introduction

This document tells you about all the support that we have in West Berkshire 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 make this leaflet. We have written this leaflet with the care leavers' forum. We will continue to listen to your views to make sure the services we offer are what you need.

To be able to get the support set out in this leaflet, you must have been in care for at least 13 weeks between the ages of 14 and 16 (including your 16th birthday) or for 13 weeks after your 16th birthday. If you are not sure whether you qualify for support, then ask your personal adviser.

This leaflet is available online at the Children and Family Services website and you can email 16 + duty to request more copies.

Your personal adviser will discuss with you about the information in this leaflet.



2. The support we must give you by law

A Personal Adviser

Following changes introduced through the Children & Social Work Act 2017, you will be able to ask to have support from your personal adviser up to the age of 25. This is to try to make sure care leavers receive similar support to young adults who live with their families.

Your personal adviser from the Care Leavers team is there to help you to prepare to live independently and to offer advice and support after you leave care. Personal advisers get involved in discussions about your needs and your pathway plan.

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

We will try to let you 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.

Your Care Leavers team 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.



Your right to be heard, your views listened to and taken into account

You have a right to be involved in all decisions about your plans for leaving care. You have a right to support from an independent advocate if you are thinking about challenging any decisions about the care we give you.

Independent advocates can inform you about your rights and help you to be heard in meetings. They are separate from social services.

Until you are 25 Here4Me provide advocates for children in care and care leavers if this is a service you want.

You have a right to see the information we keep about you, including the files and records written about you when you were in care. <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/dataprotection>

Leaving care before turning 18

We will encourage you to stay in care until you are 18. Most young people still live at home with their families at this age.

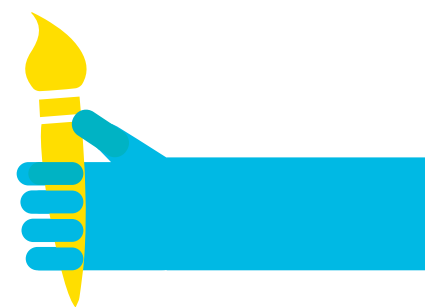
If you choose to leave care before age 18, the law says we must provide you with suitable accommodation. We will work with you to identify the best option.

Support to engage in education, employment or training

We want to make sure every young person leaving care has the support to achieve their goals in life.

The law says we must provide you with assistance with expenses linked with employment, education and training. In particular:

- We will provide you with a Higher Education (HE) bursary of at least £2,000 if you go to University.
- We will provide somewhere for you to stay during University holidays (or you can ask for funding for this if you would prefer to make your own arrangements) if you are in HE or in residential further education.



3. Other support we offer

Accommodation

If you are aged over 18, and a former relevant care leaver your personal adviser will help and support you in finding suitable accommodation in West Berkshire or where your last placement was if you lived there for 2 years. This might involve:

- If this is what you and your foster carers want, supporting you to remain with your foster carers under what's called a 'Staying Put' arrangement. This can last until you are 21
http://www.proceduresonline.com/westberks/cs/p_stay_put.html
- Support to access different housing options including social housing (this is accommodation managed by us or a housing association).
- Working with Housing Services to come up with suitable housing options for you in West Berkshire, including supported accommodation where there will be people on hand to help you if you are not ready or don't want to have your own tenancy. In West Berkshire we provide a range of local supported lodging options to meet your needs. The supported lodging hosts will work with you to increase your confidence and independence. We also work closely with the local voluntary sector to provide appropriate supported accommodation. With a local housing association, we are developing house share options for older care leavers who are ready for this.
- We have worked with our Housing Department and accommodation providers to help you gather evidence to show landlords that you have a good history as a tenant
- Advice about holding down a tenancy, including avoiding rent or Council Tax arrears, paying bills and budgeting. We know it can be very hard having your own place for the first time. We will do whatever we can to ease the pressures on you. West Berkshire Council are working towards exempting care leavers up to the age of 21 from having to pay council tax
- Helping and advising you to claim housing benefit/universal credit.
- Practical support with moving into and furnishing your new home, including a setting up home grant.
- Supporting you if you have a housing crisis, including helping if you are threatened with eviction or lose a tenancy. We have a local semi-independent provision where you can stay and be supported to access secure, long term accommodation

Did you know that care leavers aged 18-20 are treated as a priority need group in homelessness legislation?

Education, training and employment

We want you to succeed in your education, training and employment. We will ask you how you are doing and be ready to celebrate your achievements with you.

We will offer you:

- Careers information and advice , including from our Virtual School and Elevate team
- If you attend University, a bursary of £2,000 to help with the cost of books and materials

Did you know that Care leavers are a priority group for the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund administered by FE colleges, which pays a bursary of up to £1,200 a year to support vulnerable young people to participate in education ?

- Our specially devised Personal Work and Education Plan, will help you to identify your ambitions and will also provide you with your first CV.
- Support to meet your transport costs when travelling to training, school/college, apprenticeships or job interviews.
- Elevate can work closely with you and your personal advisor to identify training and work opportunities <http://westberkshire.elevateme.org.uk/>
- If English is your second language we will provide opportunities for you to improve your English
- Our Human Resources department will provide workshops for 15 years olds in care to help them understand and prepare for the world of work
- Support to buy tools, equipment, essential clothing, and books. Elevate West Berkshire will work with you and those supporting you to give advice about your future. They will also provide financial support (clothes, equipment or transport) to help you find work. They will help with your application or CV before applying for that first or next job
- Support if you choose to go to university, such as helping you obtain tuition fees and maintenance loans, travel costs at the start and end of term, and making sure you have somewhere to live during the holidays. The Virtual School will work closely with you and those who support you, to help you choose the right course and university that matches your talents and interests, and provide support

- Opportunities for work experience, apprenticeships and employment within the council.
- The chance to attend and help organise celebration events when young people achieve education, training and employment milestones. Each month we nominate a Care Leaver for an award for outstanding achievements – personal, educational or professional. Each year you will be part of our annual celebration event where you will also get the chance to inspire our younger children in our care
- If you are an Unaccompanied Asylum seeker we provide opportunities to improve your English and learn more about British culture

Health and wellbeing

Below are some of the ways our Leaving Care team 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
- Offer free access to swimming and the gym at the leisure centres the Council run
- Support you to register with a GP
- Give information on getting help to pay for prescriptions
- Support you to move from CAMHS to adult services
- Give information about counselling services that are available locally
- Give you help with transport costs when attending health appointments
- If you are a young parent, take an interest in your child/ren and support you to do the best for them. We will help you arrange childcare, if this is what you want.
- Give you information about health drop-in centres
- Give you information about contraception and sexual health, including for those who qualify free condoms under the C Card scheme
<http://c-card.areyougettingit.com/Default.aspx>
- Our Looked After Children nurse will have worked with you before you turn 18 to make a 'health passport' containing key information from your childhood (for example, when and if you have had immunisations) and your current health needs.
- Every year we will run events and trips in the summer that you can come to and we would love you to join in with
- If you are in trouble with the police or courts the Youth Offending Service will help you before you turn 18 and will be able to help you in the transition to the adult provision

Finances

We will try to help you financially, in a similar way to how parents would support their own children. Our help includes:

- Providing a leaving care grant to help you buy essential things when moving into your own home, which government recommends should be a minimum of £2,000
- Giving you exemptions on paying Council Tax
- Providing you with information about relevant money management courses to help you budget well
- Information on how to access your Junior ISA, if you have one (a fund of money set aside by the government and the council)
- Support to open a bank account if you do not already have one
- Support to gain important identification documents, such as a passport and/or provisional driving licence, before your 18th birthday
- Support to get your National Insurance number if you don't already have it
- Financial support in emergencies
- An agreement with the local jobcentre to work together to ensure a coordinated response and an era entry system
- Providing a financial gift at birthdays and Christmas or other celebrations.
- Help to fund some driving lessons



Relationships

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

- Providing you with a mentor/peer mentor through Here4Me before you turn 18 and then finding a mentor if you need one as an adult
- Where appropriate, continuing to support contact with the 'Independent Visitor' you had when were in care
- Help to maintain or regain contact safely with people special to you or who cared for you in the past, like former foster carers or social workers. We can help you to make sense of your 'life journey'.

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 and have a say
- Offering work experience through our councillors
- Informing you about voluntary work that we think you may be interested in
- Informing and possibly helping with the cost of leisure activities, as well as a free gym and swim passes to our leisure centres up to the age of 25
- Giving you advice and helping you to challenge any discrimination you face as a care leaver.



4. Who can help?



Key contact numbers

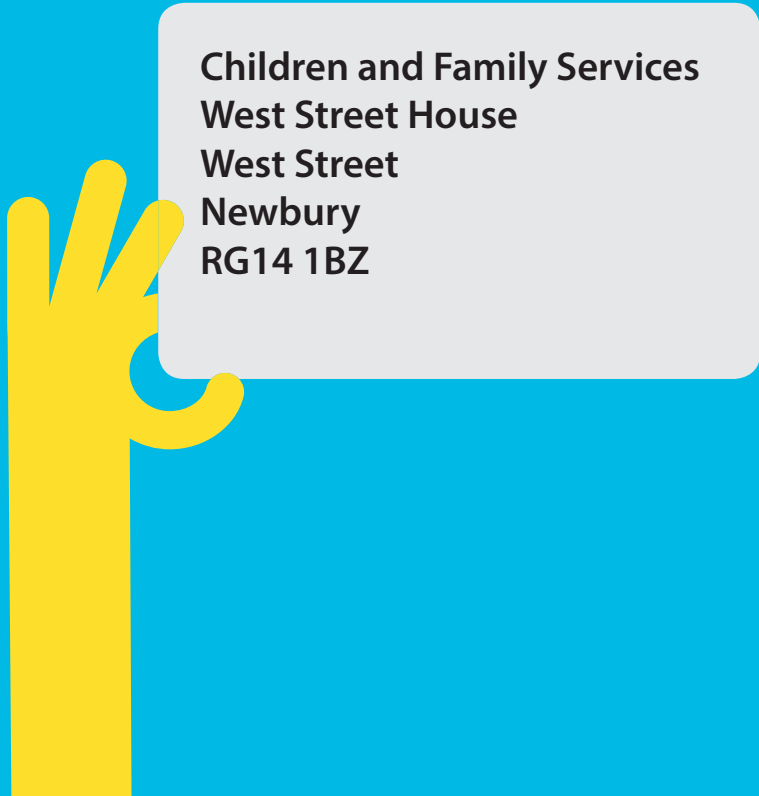
- Personal adviser
- Care Leavers team **01635 519530**
- Housing advice **01635 519530**
- Designated doctors/nurses-this will be dependent on which surgery the YP is registered with
- Virtual School **01635 503159**
- Elevate **elevate@westberks.gov.uk** West Street House
- Local authority leadership Director of Children's Services **01635 519722**,
Acting Director - Ian Pearson
Councillor for Care Leavers **01635 35107**, **Lynne Doherty**

Other places you can go for help

- Princes Trust **www.princes-trust.org.uk/ 0800 842 842**
- The Rees Foundation **www.reesfoundation.org/**
- Care Leavers' Foundation **www.thecareleaversfoundation.org/ 01678540598**
- Become **0800 0232033 www.becomecharity.org.uk**
- Family Rights Group **www.frg.org.uk/ 0808 801 0366**

Relevant universal services

- Health services such as sexual health clinics and drug/alcohol support
www.edgecrew.co.uk/ (01635) 582002
- Youth Offending Team **01635 553600 yot@westberks.gov.uk**
- Citizenship Advice Bureau **https://citizensadvicewestberkshire.org.uk/ 0300 222 5941**
- Adviza **www.adviza.org.uk/ 01635 889117**

A stylized yellow hand is shown holding a white rectangular sign with rounded corners. The sign contains the following text:

**Children and Family Services
West Street House
West Street
Newbury
RG14 1BZ**