



Department
for Education

Local offer guidance

Guidance for local authorities

February 2018

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Summary

About this guidance

This guidance is about Section 2 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 which requires each local authority to consult on and publish a local offer for its care leavers. The local offer should provide information about all the services and support that is available to care leavers from the local authority (see further information on partner agencies below), including information about both their statutory entitlements as well as any discretionary support that a local authority chooses to provide.

Section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires local authorities to have regard to seven corporate parenting principles when discharging their functions in relation to looked-after children and care leavers. The local offer should set out what support all local authority departments will provide (not just Children's Services), having regard to the corporate parenting principles.

Expiry or review date

The guidance will be reviewed on an annual basis but will not be revised unless it is considered that it requires amendment.

What legislation does this guidance refer to?

This guidance refers to:

- Sections 1 to 3 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017

Who is this guidance for?

This guidance is for local authorities and others who contribute to services provided to care leavers.

The publication of a local offer is a requirement for all local authorities in England.

For the purpose of this guidance, a local authority in England means:

- A county council in England
- A district council
- A London borough council
- The Common Council, of the City of London (in their capacity as a local authority)

- The Council of the Isles of Scilly; and
- A combined authority established under section 103 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009

Main points

Section 2 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires each local authority to consult on and publish a local offer for its care leavers. The local offer should provide information about all the services and support that is available to care leavers from the local authority (see further information on partner agencies below), including information about both their statutory entitlements as well as any discretionary support that a local authority chooses to provide.

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The local offer

Section 2 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires each local authority to consult on and publish a local offer for its care leavers. The local offer should provide information about all the services and support that is available to care leavers from the local authority (see further information on partner agencies below), including information about both their statutory entitlements as well as any discretionary support that a local authority chooses to provide.

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Details of the services and support that should be included

The local offer should include details of the services and support that may assist care leavers in, or moving to, adulthood and independent living that the local authority provides in relation to:

- **Health and wellbeing:** This will include services that teach about, support and enable good health and wellbeing. It should include links to, or information about, universal health services that might be particularly relevant to care leavers, as well as specific health and wellbeing services targeted at them.
- **Relationships:** having strong and supportive relationships is crucially important for care leavers as they move to independent adult life. Local authorities will want to consider the services and/ or support that is available to help care leavers develop and maintain positive social networks and to understand what positive relationships look like.
- **Education and training:** Care leavers should be supported to access appropriate education or training that will enable them to fulfil their goals. This will include the statutory support available to care leavers, such as the £2,000 bursary for care leavers in Higher Education, as well as any other support from the local authority; and signpost to universal information such as careers advice and financial support for young people.

- **Employment:** this will include information to care leavers about general employment support, such as careers support and links to local Job Centre Plus. Local authorities should also include any other employment support that they or partners deliver that is specifically available to care leavers, for example, any apprenticeships that the local authority offers, in particular where such opportunities are ring-fenced for care leavers.
- **Accommodation:** care leavers should be supported to access appropriate and suitable accommodation. The local authority should include relevant information about their Staying Put policy, the support available from Housing Services and any other assistance that is available to care leavers, such as advice on maintaining a tenancy.
- **Participation in society:** this will include links to and information about activities, events or volunteering opportunities available in the local area that care leavers can get involved in.

Appendix 1 provides an illustrative local offer, designed to support local authorities when developing their own. It provides examples of the types of support that local authorities may wish to provide to care leavers.

Further guide on what could be included

Each local authority (LA) will choose to prioritise different types of non-statutory support, so each local offer will be unique. The following bullet points provide a guide to what could be included:

- The local offer should include the support LAs will provide across all of its departments/services (for example, Housing and Leisure Services), not just the support provided by the Children's Services Department.
- The local offer should include – and differentiate between - both care leavers' statutory entitlements (which all care leavers in England are entitled to) and other additional support that LAs choose to provide to demonstrate their commitment to being the young person's 'corporate parent'.
- Where a partner organisation provides a discrete service for care leavers – such as a health drop-in exclusively for care leavers – and the LA is confident that there is an ongoing commitment from the partner organisation to provide that service/support, it should be included as part of the local offer.

- However, where a partner organisation is offering a service that is available to all young people, but there is no bespoke service for care leavers – such as a young people’s sexual health clinic, or a careers advice service for all 16-25 year olds – it may be more appropriate to signpost/provide a link to that service, rather than to include it as part of the local offer.

Organisations other than the LA, will be encouraged to use the care leaver covenant to set out their offer to care leavers.

Developing the local offer with relevant persons

When developing their local offer, local authorities are required to consult with relevant persons, which means care leavers and organisations or people that represent care leavers. Local authorities should consider how best to engage and consult with as many of their care leavers as possible. We expect local authorities to work with their care leavers to co-produce a local offer that is meaningful and reflects the needs, views and wishes of the care leavers they are responsible for. It may also be useful for Personal Advisers to seek the views and ideas of the care leavers that they support and work with on a regular basis.

Publishing and updating the local offer

The Children and Social Work Act does not specify how soon after commencement of the duty the local offer should be published. However, the Government’s expectation is that the local offer should be available within six to nine months of commencement of the duty. This will allow time for LAs to consult care leavers before publishing their local offer. Once local authorities have consulted on and published their local offer it should be reviewed regularly to ensure that the services on offer reflect what care leavers need most. Local authorities can choose how regularly they review their local offer, but we would expect local authorities to update it at least every two to three years, following further consultation with care leavers.

Format of the local offer

The local offer should be easily available and accessible to all care leavers in the local authority area. This may mean that it is made available in a number of formats including printed hard copies, online digital copies and in different languages as appropriate. We would also expect Personal Advisers to share and promote the local offer with the care leavers they work with and to make sure they are aware of it and the services they are entitled to. Local authorities will want to consider how the local offer is made available to, and is easily understood by, care leavers with additional needs.

The precise arrangements for consulting care leavers and the format(s) that the local offer is available in are for local authorities to determine. Local authorities are best placed to decide: how to consult care leavers in a way that is meaningful; and to decide in which formats the local offer should be available.

Care leavers living or placed outside of their local authority

Some young people who were placed out of area while they were looked-after may wish to remain in that area once they leave care – for example, if they want to Stay Put with their former foster carer. In these circumstances, the well-established convention is that the ‘placing’ LA continues to meet any costs associated with their on-going support. The requirement to produce a local offer does not alter that long-standing approach and we would expect the local offer to apply equally to those young people.

We think there may also be situations where LAs could consider opening up some elements of their local offer to care leavers who are living in their area but who have been placed there, and are supported, by another LA. For example, LAs may allow care leavers to take advantage of some of the discretionary support they provide, such as giving care leavers free access to their leisure services, or allowing them to attend healthy cooking classes that are available to local care leavers.

Appendix 1

Illustrative local offer

This document illustrates the kinds of services and support that local authorities may include in their local offer to care leavers. It includes both the statutory entitlements that a local authority must provide, as well as examples of the additional discretionary support that a local authority may choose to provide.

The local offer should reflect the local authority's commitment to the corporate parenting principles and include support available from all local authority Departments, not just Children's Services.

Local offers should be written in a way that is easy to understand and be provided in a variety of formats.

1. Purpose of the local offer

This leaflet tells you about all the support that we have in **[name of place]** 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 will continue to listen to your views to make sure the services we offer are what you need. We have written this leaflet with the help of the care leavers' forum.

To be able to get the support set out in this leaflet, 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 ask your Personal Adviser.

This leaflet is available online at *[website]*, you can email *[contact]* to request more copies.

Your Personal Adviser will talk with you about the information in this leaflet.

2. The support we must give you by law

Advice and Support from a Personal Adviser

Following changes introduced through the Children & Social Work Act 2017, you will be able to ask for support from your Personal Adviser up to the age of 25, whether you are in education or training or not.

Your Personal Adviser is there to help you to prepare to live independently and to offer advice and support after you leave care. Personal Advisers should talk to you about what support you need and record this information in your pathway plan.

Your pathway plan is written by the local authority after 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.

Your leaving care 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 and taken seriously

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 want to challenge decisions about the support we give you.

Independent advocates can inform you about your rights and help you to be heard in meetings. They are separate from Children's Services.

[Local authorities should set out how young people can access advocacy support].

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.

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.

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 funding for this if you would prefer to make your own arrangements) if you are in full time HE or full time residential further education and your term time accommodation is not available.

Staying Put with your former foster carer

- If this is what you and your foster carer(s) want, we will support you to remain with your foster carers under what is called a 'Staying Put' arrangement. This can last until you are age 21 **[Add link to Staying Put policy]**.

3. Examples of other support we offer [LAs should customise this section to reflect what discretionary support they provide]

Accommodation

If you are aged over 18, your personal adviser will help you to find suitable accommodation. This might involve:-

- Working with Housing Services to come up with suitable housing options for you, including supported accommodation if you are not ready or don't want to have your own tenancy.
- Support to access different independent housing options including social housing (this is accommodation managed by us or a housing association)
- 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 **[NB: insert information if the council exempts care leavers from council tax]**
- Helping you to claim housing benefit/universal credit.
- Practical support with moving into and furnishing your new home.
- Supporting you if you have a housing crisis, including helping if you are threatened with or lose a tenancy **[NB: care leavers aged 18-20 have a priority need 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, such as help to develop your CV, advice about job interviews, including what you might wear.

[NB: 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]

- Support to meet your transport costs when travelling to training, school/college, apprenticeships or job interviews.
- Support to buy tools, equipment, essential clothing, and books.
- 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. We will help you choose the right course and university that matches your talents and interests.
- 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.

Health and wellbeing

Below are some of the ways our care leaving 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
- 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
- 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.

Finances

We will try to help you financially, including:

- Providing a leaving care grant to help you buy essential things when moving into your own home **[The government recommends this should be a minimum of £2,000]**
- Giving you exemptions to or discounts on paying Council Tax
- Providing or telling you about relevant money management courses
- Information on how to access your Junior ISA or Child Trust Fund
- Support to open a bank account.
- 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.
- Exceptional financial support in emergencies
- Providing a financial gift at birthdays and Christmas or other celebrations.

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;
- 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
- Offering work experience with 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
- Giving you advice and helping you to challenge any discrimination you face as a care leaver.

4. Who can help?

Key contact numbers for:

- Personal adviser
- Care leaving team
- Housing advice
- Designated doctors/nurses
- Education, employment or training support
- Local authority leadership e.g. the Director of Children's Services, Lead Member
- Care leavers' forum

Other places you can go for help:

- Princes Trust
- The Rees Foundation
- Rees Care Leavers' Foundation

Relevant universal services. This might include links to or contacts for:

- Health services such as sexual health clinics and drug/alcohol support
- Information about further or higher education
- Relevant youth clubs/groups/activities
- Parenting support groups
- Youth Offending Team
- Citizenship Advice Bureau



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