

Southampton Local Offer for Care Leavers

Welcome to the Southampton City Council Care Leavers Offer. This publication is for the young people and young adults who are leaving our care, and the children who are still in our care. Becoming an adult is never easy, and we know that this can be doubly tough for young people who have experienced disruption and trauma in their lives. Therefore, this is our way of explaining to you the support that we want to provide you with as you become an adult and as you leave our care. We have written this so that you can understand our offer and hold us to account to ensure that we deliver the right service for you.

This offer is ambitious. It is designed only with you in mind. We remain your corporate parent even though you have turned 18. We are still committed to you. We want you to be and feel safe, have strong lasting relationships, reach your goals, be healthy and financially secure and achieve your goals. Just because you are leaving our care, we are not leaving you, and we will be with you every step of the way. This offer sets out the framework of the support and services that we and other partner services can and will offer to you. Our goal is to ensure that you become a successful adult, that your aspirations are met, and that your adult life is full of love and happiness.

We know that, for some, leaving care can feel like a worrying time. We want you to understand what you can expect from us and so this offer is designed so that you know what help and support you can receive from Southampton City Council. We know that some of our young people do not live in Southampton. These young people will still be entitled to a Southampton Personal Advisor (PA) and some financial supports. Your PA will still help you to access services that can support you in the area where you live, although some parts of this offer may not be available to you if they are specific to Southampton Council and the Corporate Parenting Partnership. Your PA can help you to understand this if you need help.

The legal bit

This is what the law says that we must do. Whilst we want to support you simply because we care about you, it is also important that you understand the legal framework that we can offer you a service through. Some parts of this are a bit complicated, so if you need any help understanding this, then speak to your Social Worker, personal advisor or advocate so that they can talk this through with you if helpful.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 says that:

A local authority in England MUST publish information about

- The services which it offers for people leaving its' care under the Children Act 1989; and
- Information about other services that it offers that may support young people leaving care to prepare for adulthood and independent living.

This is to include services that may support them with

- Their health and well-being
- Their relationships
- Their education and training
- Their employment
- Their accommodation; and
- Their participation in society

This information is known as the " local offer for care leavers."

How do I know if I am a care leaver?

The Law can be a little complicated in this area, and so there are some explanations below about the different care leavers' statuses. If you have any questions about whether you are entitled to a service as a care leaver then please contact Children's Services on **xxxxxx**.

- **Eligible child**
 - is a child aged 16 and 17 who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who is still being looked after by Children's Services.
- **Relevant child**
 - is a child aged 16 and 17 who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who has left care. This also includes young people who were detained (e.g. in custody or hospital) when they turned 16, and who were looked after immediately before being detained
- **Former relevant child**
 - is a young person over 18 who was previously 'eligible' or 'relevant'. Children's Services must support this group until aged 21, or longer if they are in education or training
- **Qualifying child or young person**
 - is any young person aged 16 - 21 who left care on or after their 16th birthday, but have been in care for **less** than 13 weeks since their 14th birthday; or were a "relevant," young person who has returned home for six months or more.
 - a young person who was in care to a local authority at the point that they became subject to a Special Guardianship Order. Or;
 - were relevant children, but returned home for a period of 6 months
- **Former relevant child pursuing education** is any former relevant child stopped being worked with by Children's Services, for any reason. If children's services are informed that they're planning to continue education or training they can ask the council for support. If eligible, any help would last until their 25th birthday
- **Extension to 25 years old** - If you are under 25 years old and previously looked after by Southampton City Council, and any of the above explanations are right for you, then under the Children and Social Work Act

2017 you are entitled to return to as for support and advice until the age of 25 years.

To be able to get all the support set out in this local offer, you must be a relevant or a former relevant child/young person/Care Leaver. If you are not sure whether you are entitled to support, then please ask your Personal Adviser, or phone the **Care Leavers and in Care** duty team to ask for advice. This leaflet is available online at **[website]**, you can email **[contact]** to request more copies.

Your Social Worker or Personal Adviser will talk with you about the information in this leaflet, and if there is anything else you would like us to do to make sure that you understand it please let us know.

I think I am a “Qualifying Care Leaver,” what does this mean for me?

To be a Qualifying Care Leaver a young person must have been

- In care on their 16th birthday
- Left Care on or after their 16th birthday but were in care for less than 13 weeks since their 14th birthday.
- Be a relevant Care Leaver who has returned home for 6 months or more.

The good news is that we are still able to provide you with a service and want to do so. The minimum level of service you can expect is listed below.

- We will keep in touch with you
- Give you advice and support
- Provide or pay for accommodation during college or university holidays if you are studying full-time away from home, up to the age of 25

Children Social Care MAY also

- Support you with accommodation in exceptional circumstances
- Support you by directly purchasing some things that you directly need, or in exceptional circumstances providing some financial support to meet your education or welfare needs
- Support with some expenses relating to education and training until the age of 25
- Contribute towards some living expenses related to your education and training.

What is a Personal Advisor?

A Personal Advisor is a person who is dedicated to working with you to support your needs. They will build a relationship with you, any relevant family members, and any professionals that you are working with to support you with your leaving care journey. They will work with you to build your pathway plan, and this should be written with you.

What is a Pathway Plan?

A Pathway plan is a plan written with you which helps set out your needs, future goals, and helps to identify exactly what support you will receive from us. I should say what we and you need to do to help achieve these. We will review your pathway plan with you every six months so that it is kept up to date. Importantly it will have your views and wishes in it because it is about you.

Your pathway plan will focus on lots of areas, to ensure that you are properly supported with areas such as relationships, home and housing, being able to participate in society, your health needs and your education, training and employment needs.

What if I want support or a Pathway Plan after I turn 21?

If you are a relevant former relevant care leaver then this is not a problem because we would like you to stay with us until the age of 25! Since the Children & Social Work Act 2017, you will be able to ask for support from the service or a Personal Adviser up to the age of 25, whether you are in Higher Education or not. We will also advise you if at the age of 21, we think it would help if we remain involved to support you (and encourage you to stay working with us). However, this will be your choice. You may only want a short period of support about one thing, or a fully Pathway Planning Service. That is ok as you are in control of this. We are here to support you.

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 need and your circumstances.

Importantly, even if you have decided to stop working with us, you have the option to come back to us for help and support until the age of 25.

To be clear, we do not want you to leave us at 21, we want you to stay and have our help until you feel ready to leave. This means that we will not stop working with you unless you ask us to do so. However, remember if you do ask us to stop supporting you, you can still come back until you are 25!

Remember if you are a qualifying care leaver and in education or training, we will still support you with this, and even if you are not in education and training and you are in difficulty, we would want to hear from you and see what we can do to help you. We do not want you to feel stuck, worried or alone.

How often will you see me?

We want our relationship with you to feel strong, meaningful and caring. Our minimum standard of seeing you is every two months, but we will want to be in touch with you more often either in person or at home. We will aim to see you in your accommodation at least two monthly so that we can make sure that this is still meeting your needs.

If you move address, we will see your accommodation within seven days and then by 28 days as we will want to spend time with you reviewing your pathway plan within 28 days of you moving address.

When you are first living independently, we will want to see you more often. This is because we will want to be sure that you are ok and that you have everything practically and emotionally that you need. We will therefore see you at least every four weeks for the first six months of you living independently to make sure things are going smoothly.

The above visiting patterns are what we do as a minimum, however we are not restricted to this and we will see you more often (but not less!) as any need arises. If you think you need to see or speak to us please get in contact straight away, that is why we are here.

Southampton County Council's Local Offer For Care Leavers

Your accommodation and housing needs

We know that one of the main things that our young people worry about is where they will live. This is understandable as having a solid base from which to do all the other important things in your life is so important to you and to us.

As a young person who has eligible, relevant or former relevant care leaver status with Southampton City Council, you will automatically be able to join the Southampton Housing Register. This does not mean that you will necessarily be ready to have your own tenancy at 18, and most young people remain living within their family or friends' networks at this age. We will work with you to consider how to best support your housing needs. There are various options for your housing, and these will include:

- **Staying Put**
 - This means that if you are in a fostering household that we can work with you and your carer to remain with them after you 18th birthday if you both agree that this is the best thing to do.
 - You would then move to alternative accommodation at a later stage when you feel more ready.
- **Supported Accommodation**
 - We work with a range of different supported accommodation providers, where you can live "semi-independently." This means that you will have your own space in shared accommodation, but that there will be different levels of support available to you to help you get used to living in a different way. Your social worker, or personal advisor will work with you to discuss the different options that are available to you and help plan what is right for you.
- **A Social Housing or Council Tenancy**
 - Once you have reached the stage where we both agree that you can live independently and maintain a tenancy without risk of this being lost, you will have the option to apply to Southampton City Council for social housing (this is accommodation managed by the council). Our Care Leavers Service already has access to several

available tenancies a year for our care leavers, and as a care leaver when you **and** your personal advisor think that you are 'tenancy ready', you will be given priority. Your personal advisor will work with our housing services to support this transition to a social housing tenancy.

- If you live outside of Southampton, then we cannot award you priority status for another local authority. However, we will work with you and your local housing authority to ensure that they recognise your care leaver status, and we will advocate on your behalf that you should have a priority status where possible.
- **Return home to birth or extended family**
 - If this is safe for you to do and this is a decision that you make, then we will support you to do this and work with your birth or extended family to make sure that you are ok and that the transition goes smoothly.

Other supports with your accommodation needs

Practical Supports with your accommodation needs

- Your Personal Advisor will work with you to look at the best sort of accommodation that there is for you as part of your pathway plan. The goal of this plan will be to support you to become independent at a pace that is right for you.
- Our goal is to ensure that you will be ready to receive and maintain a secure social housing tenancy, or, ideally, your own property. We will work with you on what needs to happen to get you to this point through your pathway plan. We will not support you being provided with a social housing tenancy until you are ready to do so, because we would not want you to lose this. We want you to work with us to get you ready for this though!
- Your safety is important to us. We will work with you and partner agencies to ensure that wherever you live you are safe and that people that you live with do not cause a risk to you.
- We will work with you to look at your budget, help you consider what you can and cannot afford.
- We will work with you to ensure that you claim any entitlements that could support you to fund any part of your accommodation such as housing benefits etc.

- We will advocate for you with your landlords should you need it so that you are not exploited.
- We know that when you strike out on your own, that it can be a worrying time. We will see you at least every 4 weeks for the first six months after you have left your previous “care arrangement,” and more regularly you need us too. We will almost certainly see you more in the first month of you moving out to help with any challenges, worries or advice that you may need. We will always be at the end of the phone too if you need us.
- If you are studying away at university or college, we will work with you to ensure that you have accommodation during the holiday periods so that this is not something that you are worried about.
- If you are at university, we will act as your guarantor for your student accommodation.
- Where you have an established social housing tenancy with the council, we will work with our housing services to prevent you losing your tenancy should you run into challenges with it.

Financial Support with your accommodation needs

- Where there are very specific supported housing needs to be met through private providers, we will support the funding of this and set a plan with the provider and yourself to support you to be able to find greater independence within a clear timescale.
- When you have your own tenancy, we will help you to furnish your new home and decorate it with money from your care leavers grant (this grant is £2000).
- We will help you to claim your council tax exemption in Southampton. Care leavers living in Southampton do not pay council tax until they reach the age of 25.
 - If you do not live in the City, then we cannot make other local authorities exempt you from paying Council Tax, however we will talk to them to see if there is any council tax relief that you are entitled to as a care leaver living in their authority.
- We will help provide a handyman/woman to support you with putting things up if needed when you first move into your new place
- We will work with you to find the best internet provider if you are working or in education or training. We will also fund this for the first six months of you living alone whilst you get used to budgeting.

- It is the law that you must have a TV licence if you are watching television, even if this is through a laptop. We will fund the first year of this for you whilst you get used to budgeting.

Health and well-being needs

We know that your physical, mental and emotional health needs are really important to you being able to become a successful and happy adult and therefore we want to ensure that your pathway plan looks at these needs with you and plans to address any areas where you may have relevant support. We understand that you may still need support to recover from the reasons that you entered care in the first place, and we will work with you to find ways to do this.

Practical support with your health and well-being needs

- With the help of our health colleagues, we will ensure that you have a health passport which provides you with your health history. This is really important as it will have the details of your childhood immunisations, and any current critical health needs. We will keep a copy of this for you too so that you can access it should you mislay it for any reason.
- We will help you to understand your life history so that you understand why you were in our care and support you with this if it is upsetting.
- Ensure that you are registered with a GP and a dentist so that your medical needs can be met.
- Provide you with information about local counselling and mental health services locally and help you to access these (to include helping to set up and coming to your first appointment with you if you would like us to) so that you can access these with greater ease.
- Provide you with information about any local relevant health drop in clinics that may be of support to you.
- We will visit you if you need to stay in hospital and ensure that you have the things that you need for your stay.
- We will encourage you to join in any activities that we arrange for young people who are care leavers such as our Care Leavers Café where you can be involved in positive activities.

Financial support with your health and well-being needs

- Support the payment of any prescriptions that you need if you are not exempt from paying for these until you are 21 years old.
 - If you have no recourse to public funds due to your immigration status, then this will be up to the age of 25.
- Provide financial support to help you travel to health appointments if you need it.
- Provide up to a £300/year health budget that your PA can apply for on your behalf to specifically support you specifically with any additional health or well-being issues.
- We will help you to travel to attend any recognised parent support groups that you may want to access should you become a parent.

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Managing money and financial Supports

Managing your money is really important as you become more independent. Budgeting can be difficult and stressful, and we are there to help you with it. Your Personal Advisor will support you with this a part of your pathway plan. Whilst you may receive some financial support, and many of these financial supports are shown in this offer, you will be expected to manage your own finances and live within your income. This income will come from your employment, or educational grants/student loans or if eligible any benefits. We will help you to sort out any of these things so don't worry.

Practical support with money management

- We will work with you to ensure that you have identification that enables you to open important things like bank accounts. This will include helping you to apply for a passport, birth certificate and provisional driving licence.
- We will help you obtain your national insurance number.
- We will help you to open a bank account and to access any savings that you may have.
- We will support you to apply for jobs and prepare you to find work
- We will help you claim any education grants that you are entitled to, or student loans.
- Where needed we will help you to claim any benefits that you are entitled to, but we will want to help you find work or remain in some form of education first, because we want you to do well and we have strong aspirations for you.
- We know that money worries or debt can have a huge effect on well-being. If you start to worry about these things then talk to us straight away and we will help you work out a plan to put things right. The quicker you talk to us about these things the easier it will be to help you put this right so please do not delay talking to us. This does not mean that we will always provide you with finances, but it does mean that we will support you, advocate and negotiate for your with any creditors and try to find the best solutions with you.

Direct financial support

- Most of the direct financial supports that you are entitled to are highlighted throughout this local offer, and your PA will work with you to help you consider anything that may help you.

- If you are making a benefit application, we will support you with an equivalent payment whilst you are awaiting the first payment.
- If you are at university, we will support you to find and fund suitable accommodation in university holidays
- We know that for many, learning to drive is important and that this can support you both in terms of employment, and seeing the important people in your lives. We already provide match funding for young people who have saved towards their driving lessons. We are committed to providing support for you to learn to drive at the pace that is right for you when you are ready. This might be through an intensive course.
- Emergency one-off payments – we know that very occasionally there may be sudden situations where you find yourself in difficulty and are worried about how you may eat or have heating or electricity. If this happens talk to us. We may not always provide a cash payment to help with this, but we will help work out a solution with you!

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Education training and employment

In Southampton, we have very high aspirations for children in care and care leavers. We believe that everyone who leaves our care should be supported to have the best life possible and that they should gain employment or have access to further education or higher education. Therefore, we will be dedicated to helping you to achieve employment or gain education and training so that you can achieve employment in the future. We believe that you should work or study to be the best that you can be. To promote your ability to engage with work, education and training there are various practical and financial supports that we offer these are:

Practical support with education employment and training

- Our PAs and our young persons' employment hub can and will support you with a range of different activities, these range from looking from supporting you to become work ready through looking for courses and/or work experience to help you, or helping you with CV, application form writing and interview practice for any jobs, apprenticeships or courses that you want to apply for.
- The service holds an internal meeting called the EET MEET where your PA can get support advice for you about what options there may be to help you get ready for employment, education or training. Please tell your PA if you would like them to discuss options for you.
- If because of previous disruption you need support in gaining foundation skills in Maths and English we will help find you a course so that you gain these. This is often really important to help you move forward and realise your goals.
- We will inform you of any Southampton City Council apprenticeships that we think you would be interested in before they are advertised and help you to apply for them. Because you are a care leaver, if you meet the person specification on the job description, then we will guarantee that you get an interview.
- We will support you to complete applications to attend college of university and help you to attend open days with either your carer, your social worker or PA to that you can make informed choices about what you want to do next.
- We will ensure that you are supported to apply for any bursaries of finances that you are entitled to.

- We will link you with relevant student support services so that they can support you.

Financial Support with education employment and training

Employment and Training

- We will ensure that you have a smart outfit to wear for any interviews
- We will purchase your first work uniform if you need one, or contribute to the cost of 'tools for the trade'.
- We will fund a bus or train pass for your first month of employment until you get paid for the first time so that you don't have to worry about funding this until you are earning.
- We will consider offering at least on weeks paid work experience in areas of the council that you may be interested in working in.

Education

- If you are at university, we will provide you with a £2000 bursary.
- If you are at university, we will visit you once a term and take you food shopping and out for lunch!
- We will act as the guarantor for your university accommodation.
- We will help support you with accommodation in the university holidays.
- If you are studying away we will help fund travel back to the city once a term so that you can connect with the people who are important to you.
- We will ensure that you can afford the travel to training, college or university and support you if you cannot with a bus pass.

Support if you become a parent

As your corporate parent, when you become a parent, we want you to be the best mum or dad you can be to your own child. We understand that become a parent can be both a magical, but also daunting time, particularly for young parents who may not always have had the best experience of being parented themselves. Don't worry though because we will be there to help you both practically and financially with this new and exciting adventure. We know that you want to do the very best for your child, and we understand the importance of babies and children having the very best start in life so we will be with you every step of the way.

Practical support if you become a parent

- We will help you to attend midwifery and antenatal appointments
- We will make referrals to the family nurse partnership so that they can work with you to help prepare you for the birth of your child
- We will help ensure that you have supportive networks that you can turn to if you need help, advice or a day off from being a parent. This can include putting you in touch with an organisation called 'Safe Families', who can offer you really practical support as a parent. Your PA will explain to you if you are interested.

Financial support if you become a parent

- We will take you shopping to buy essential items to support you with your baby up to the value of £300
- We will ensure that you have the means to attend antenatal appointments
- We will ensure that you have the means to attend children's centres or parent craft groups

Participating in society

We want all young people and adults leaving our care to feel able to participate in society, feel included and have the same experiences as other young people. Below are a range of support activities that can make a real difference to you and others and we would like to help you feel able to engage in some of them.

Practical support with Participation in society

- We will invite you to be part of Southampton Voices Unite Seniors which is out care leavers forum. This is where you can tell us how we can improve services to you (including this offer!) and meet other young people to undertake social activities.
- We will invite you to be part of the Care Leavers Supper Club. This is where care leavers can meet with other care leavers, cook together and enjoy a healthy meal and a catch up.
- We will ask you to complete any relevant surveys that are undertaken to help us better understand the service you receive.
- We will invite you to attend our football sessions open to all our care leavers

Financial Support with Participation

- Until you are 21, we will provide a specific positive activity payment of £10/fortnight so that you can engage with recognised activities (sport or a hobby) that are positive for the body and soul!
- We will contribute to the purchase of any initial equipment that you may need to engage in a recognised sport or hobby up to a value of £200.
- We will ensure that you are able to travel to and from your activity until you are 21.
- We will ensure that you are able to travel to any parent craft sessions that you may want to engage in until the age of 25
- If you help us with the organisation or running of specific participation events or to interview for staff etc then we will pay you in vouchers at the rate of £10/hour.