



Our 'Local Offer for Care Leavers' – September 2019

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About this guide

The law says all local councils must to write and publish a list of services that all care leavers will be able to access after they reach the age of 18 years.

We call this list the "**Local Offer for Care Leavers**".

In this guide you will find Thurrock Council's local offer to support all young people leaving our care. We want to achieve best outcomes for our care leavers and provide all young adults leaving care in Thurrock with the best possible chance of success.

As a local council caring for young people, we are 'corporate parents'. We want only for the best for our children and young people and we take our parental role very seriously.

In July 2019, we held a special event with care leavers to help us think carefully about what we should know and what we need to do as 'corporate parents' to meet their needs. Thank you to everyone who took part and helped us make this guide.

We hope you will find it very useful.

Summary

What you can expect

Thurrock Council's Aftercare Service will support you as you learn to live more independently. Your Personal Adviser will help to make positive and ambitious plans for your future.

You can expect that:

1. your Personal Adviser will listen to you and help you with decisions that will affect your future – you will be provided with the information and support required to help you make decisions about where you are going to live, what you are going to do and how we will support you to look after yourself

This means:

2. you will always have a Personal Advisor by your 18th birthday and, where possible, by the time you are 16½ years-old – when you have an allocated Personal Advisor, you will decide with them and your Social Worker how they will support you on your journey to young adulthood and beyond

We will:

3. create an individual Pathway Plan with you that clearly sets out what you need, your aspirations, goals, including where you will live, study and work
4. provide you with somewhere safe to live and help you make it your home
5. offer you a clear financial plan setting out the money you will have to spend on everything, including rent, bills, travel, food and your wellbeing
6. support you with education, training and employment opportunities
7. help you to be healthy
8. provide you with a health passport which will include your health history and health needs
9. make sure you have a passport, national insurance number and birth certificate
10. listen to you and share with you clearly what you can do if you are not happy about something
11. help you with contact with your family if you want this and it is safe for this to happen – obviously as an adult you are free to make your own choices, but we will help you to think about what will work or not

Who will support you

As a young adult leaving care you will have an allocated Personal Adviser (PA) where possible from the age of 16½ years but at a minimum by your 18th birthday.

Your Social Worker, your Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) and your Personal Adviser where allocated will start to talk with you about a new plan for your future, called a 'Pathway Plan'.

This plan will set out the things you need as you prepare to live your life independently when you are 18 years-old.

Your Pathway Plan will be an important part of your journey to leaving our care and we will help you write it so that you understand the support you have as you make decisions about where you will live, the job you do or the education and training you want to continue.

Your Social Worker and Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), who know you well, will remain responsible, with you, for your Pathway Plan until you are 18.

In the year and a half whilst we support you to prepare for your 18th birthday, we really hope that a new and important relationship will develop with your Personal Adviser. They will become an important adult in your life until you are 25 years-old.

Please do think of your Pathway Plan as being as important as a guide for you –you could have a shorter copy on your fridge or somewhere you can see it regularly so you stay hopeful about your future!

How you will be involved

Your Pathway Plan will be based on your current needs. It will set out the support that will be offered to you to help you achieve your aspirations.

You will be fully involved in the development of the plan. You will be offered support from your Personal Adviser, your Social Worker and your IRO to express your wishes and views for your Pathway Plan review meetings as well.

Your Pathway Plan will cover:

- where you will live
- education, training and employment
- skills to help you live independently
- health and development
- relationships and support
- family and social networks

Your Personal Adviser will help you to develop and work with a support network, which may include family, friends, cultural or religious organisations, and other support services.

Your Personal Adviser will visit you as often as you need to give you the maximum amount of support. At a minimum, they will always visit when you move in to a new house, or within 3 weeks when they are new to you. They will stay in contact with you every 8 weeks, but you can ask to see them more often.

Your Pathway Plan is important for you and for us so we can agree goals that support your future needs and aspirations. We have high ambitions for you, so it's important you're involved in the writing of your plan.

When writing your plan, we will focus on what is working well, what you may be worried about, and what practical things need to happen to make your plan work for you. We must check what is working with your plan at least every 6 months, but life changes happen so often that it would usually be more regular.

Remember: your plan belongs to you. If you want us to look at it and make changes at any time, please just ask. This is your life, you are in control of much of it, and we are here to make it a happy and safe one.

Birthdays, festivals and other significant moments in life

All young adults leaving care will receive a birthday card from their Personal Adviser, a good luck phone call ahead of exams, and communication on the first day of a new job.

If you need immigration support

You may be a young adult leaving our care who was or is an unaccompanied asylum seeking child and have an application with the Home Office, which is under consideration for asylum and refugee status.

Sometimes these applications can take a long time to process – maybe even years. During this time you will not have permanent status in the UK nor be able to work or receive regular benefits, you will be entitled to support from our care leavers service, including funding for housing, living, healthcare and prescriptions.

It will be important that we plan with you as much as possible before you reach 18 years of age. You can ask your Personal Adviser for more information about support to which you are entitled and how to appeal decisions.

If your 'leave to remain' status is approved, it will normally last for 5 years, subject to review. It will also grant you the right to work and possibly claim benefits during this period. Further periods of leave to remain can also be granted and we will help you apply for this.

As part of your Pathway Plan, it will be important to talk about what happens if your application for leave to remain in the UK is denied.

Your Personal Adviser will look for ways to appeal, as well as what happens if you are facing removal from the UK and how this may need to be planned.

If there are no more ways to appeal, we can continue supporting you financially until it's time for you to leave the UK. We will support you emotionally and practically to think about your options.

The important thing to remember is that we will not abandon you!

1. Your home

"Where will I live?"

One of the most important decisions we must agree with you as a young adult leaving our care is where you are going to live. It is very important that wherever you live, it is safe and feels like a home.

Your Personal Adviser (PA) is here to help you with this, working through the options available to you and helping you to decide on what will be best for you at that time. All plans for where you live will need to be included in your Pathway Plan and agreed at your reviews.

If you have been living with foster carers

If you are living with foster carers and want to stay there after you become 18 years-old then, as long as your foster carers agree, we will support you to remain there. This is called 'Staying Put'.

A Staying Put arrangement is when a young person who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, and is living with foster carers when they turn 18, continues to live there after their 18th birthday.

If you are Staying Put, we will facilitate, monitor and support the arrangement until you reach the age of 21.

If you have been living in a children's home or other residential care

If you have been living in a children's home or other residential care, we will help you to stay in touch with special adults there. You may see less of them but this is something you could write into your Pathway Plan if it's important to you.

We will usually try to help you to live locally in Thurrock but if you have an established support network with links away from Thurrock and wish to remain there, we will try to support this where possible.

Somewhere warm and safe to live

Having somewhere, warm and safe to live is very important. If you were living with your family or with your parents, it is unlikely you would move away to live alone at the young age of 18 years-old. That's why in Thurrock, we will encourage you to stay living with the carers you know – or very close by – so you have good support.

We will take care about whether you are ready to live alone and will discuss it together a lot. Your Pathway Plan will make very clear what is good for you, what you want and how we are going to manage this together.

We want it to be 'good for you' so this is one of the most important things when planning for your future!

We will make sure you have a home that is safe, "homely" and able to match your personal needs.

Options

Our options for where you can live once you are 18 years-old include:

- Staying Put – we will help you stay with a foster family, if you are already living with that family, for as long as possible so your move to semi-independence or full independence will happen only when you are practically, mentally and emotionally ready
- Housing register – you will be placed on our housing list as soon as you turn 18 years-old, which means when you're ready for a permanent home you can consider social housing
- Supported accommodation – this could be a shared house or flat where you have your own room but share some facilities with other young people, and receive support from a housing support officer
- Shared Lives / supported lodgings – this type of arrangement means sharing with an adult who will be there to help if you need it, and who will also be able to support you to live independently in their home
- independent accommodation – rented from a housing association or a private landlord
- returning to live with your family

When you are ready, a permanent home with either a social housing or private housing tenancy will be considered. Your legal status as a care leaver gives you the right to be placed on to the housing list, but it is important that this doesn't happen until you feel able to live completely on your own and manage the responsibilities like paying all your bills on time. We can plan for this when we are writing your Pathway Plan.

Moving in

Moving to live on your own is a massive step. It's not just about paying bills and cooking your own food, it's also about staying healthy and getting on with your neighbours. Your Social Worker or Personal Adviser will talk to you as part of the pathway planning process about the best ways for this to be a success that lasts.

On 'Moving in Day' we will make sure that the right person is there to support you and make sure everything goes smoothly. We realise this can be an exciting but also scary time. Your Personal Adviser will be there with you every step of the way for emotional and practical support.

We will help you settle in and make sure all practical things are in place such as water, gas and electricity'.

2. Education, employment and training

Your Personal Adviser will help you access our 'Inspire' training and career services. You will receive support from a specialist education and employment advisor, helping you into education, employment or training.

We have high ambitions for you and will encourage and support you into a job that is good for you. We will make sure you know what options are available to you, such as a university course, an apprenticeship or a training course.

We believe that every single young adult can and should be able to work or study. Your Personal Adviser will stick by you when you are deciding what you wish to do – and will be there to give you a helping push and encouragement when you are unsure!

It does not matter if you have a gap in your education, you can always start again, but should try to do this as soon as is reasonably possible.

Financial support to attend higher education, such as university or college

We will help you get the funding you need in order to do well. Your Personal Adviser will support you with any practical things you may need.

As a young adult leaving care, you can access financial support for your education. Some of this is specifically for young adults leaving care – your Personal Adviser will support you with this.

As a young adult leaving our care and attending higher education, you can access financial support to help with education equipment and living costs. Some of this is specifically for young adults leaving care. Ask your Personal Adviser for the current amounts and help to apply.

You can apply for student loans and grants but you will not usually be able to claim benefits.

Student loans and maintenance loans are administered by Student Finance. Both will need to be repaid when your earnings reach a certain amount when you have completed your course of further study. For further information, go to the government's student finance website:

www.gov.uk/student-finance

You may also be entitled to a Higher Education Bursary to meet the costs of your 'out of term' accommodation. For further information, go to the government's website on supporting university finances: www.gov.uk/extra-money-pay-university

Buttle UK is a charity that awards universities a 'quality mark' for offering additional support to young adults leaving care. Find out what they can offer at www.buttleuk.org

Propel, which is run by the Become charity, helps care leavers search for courses, colleges and university places – go to: propel.org.uk/UK

Opportunities to boost your CV

There are opportunities available which would look great on your CV too, such as:

1. recruiting and interviewing new children's services professionals at Thurrock Council
2. meeting elected councillors and sharing your experiences with help them to help them consider whether services for children, young people and young adults are reaching the right people in the right way
3. getting involved in one of our focus groups –throughout the year we may set-up a group to help us look at areas we would like to change or be advised on, and it's important to us that young people are part of shaping the service that they receive

Ask your Personal Adviser how you can get involved.

3. Health and well-being

We will help you prepare to be ready to leave care by supporting you to look after your health and well-being.

You will receive a 'Health passport', which is a book that has details of your health history. Keep this safe for when you may need it.

At the back of this book there are useful contacts of organisations, helping you to register with a GP (doctor) or a dentist.

It is important that you take care of yourself and speak to your Personal Adviser about any health concerns you may have. Your Pathway Plan will also include any health needs that you may have, so remember to keep your Personal Adviser updated.

4. Money

Your Personal Adviser will help you manage your money and understand any benefits you may be entitled to if you need to claim them. We understand that the cost of things increases as time goes on, and we will review our offer of financial support to care leavers each year to make sure it keeps up with significant changes.

Although you may still receive some financial support once you are 18 years-old, you will be expected to find your income from work, education grants and, if eligible, benefits. In most instances, we will not be responsible for your daily living costs.

Of course, we won't forget your birthdays – you will receive a birthday card from us up until you are 21 years old. Your 21st birthday will be marked with a gift of £50 and, where possible, a meal. There is also Christmas, and perhaps other religious festivals that you may celebrate – we will mark these special times with a gift and, where possible, a visit.

Your Personal Adviser will also make sure there is someone to support you in the event of a crisis or when things do not go according to plan.

Benefits

We don't assume that all care leavers will need to claim benefits. Claiming benefits, if that's what you need, is not simple and you need to make sure you apply for everything you're entitled to. Your Personal Adviser will be able to help you with this.

You will need identification documents and a bank account for the benefits to be paid. Your Personal Adviser will help you to get these in place before your 18th birthday, and support you to apply for your benefits before your birthday so that everything is set up to reduce any delays in payments.

If you are receiving benefits and find yourself in a 'sanction' from the government's Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) – which usually means that you will receive no money – you should contact your Personal Adviser urgently.

Debt

Debt and money worries can have a serious impact on your well-being. We want to know as soon as you start to worry about having enough money. At that moment, we will help you.

We won't be able to give you more money than you are entitled to, but we will find ways for your life and living arrangements to be manageable.

Do not leave these worries unresolved – get in touch.

Emergency payments

Unexpected situations may arise that may leave you in a financial crisis or at risk of not being able to eat or heat your home. In these times, a one-off emergency payment can be provided. We will talk to you about this option should the need arise.

Help with your rent

If you are over 18 years-old, living away from your family and studying full-time in non-advanced education – up to and including A-level or equivalent – you can claim Housing Benefit. You can enrol in your course of study at any time up to your 21st birthday and can continue to receive this benefit up to the end of your studies or the end of the academic year in which you become 21 years old, whichever is earlier.

This help is also available to you if you have stayed on with your former foster carers.

Housing Benefit can pay for all or part of your rent. If you are likely to have difficulty paying your full rent, you ask our Housing department for Discretionary Housing Payments. These are not guaranteed, but we may be able to help you for a period until you find other accommodation or earn enough to pay your rent yourself.

Help with your council tax

Council Tax is a payment made to your local authority for local services such as collecting your rubbish, clearing streets, providing services (including social workers!) and maintaining parks.

All care leavers living in Thurrock are exempt from paying Council Tax up to the age of 25.

This means that as a young adult leaving our care, you will not have to pay Council Tax if you live in Thurrock. We made this decision so you have the best chance of success living independently. This another sign from us that we want to support you and we want your future to be good!

TV licence

Everyone who watches TV, even if it is only via a catch-up service or online on your laptop, has to have and pay for a licence. Payments can be divided up into weekly or monthly payments – your Personal Adviser will help you apply. You are at risk of a fine or worse if you do not have a licence.

Setting up home allowance

It's exciting to be able to choose your own furniture and how your home will look. We will provide you with a grant of £2,000 to help with this. It won't be given to you in one lump sum but will be spent with your Personal Adviser.

This grant is not meant to meet the costs of personal support or accommodation. It is an important mark of your independence, so we want you to spend it wisely on things that will help you to make this important step towards independence.

Additional one-off payments

In addition to the above, care leavers can also receive one-off payments for:

- housing costs – dependent on financial assessment and agreement from a senior manager responsible for our Children's Services
- travel costs for attending a training course
- fares to job and education interviews if you are not in education or training
- travel warrants to support contact with your family if you or they live outside of Thurrock

5. Preparing to leave care

We are developing a new programme to help you with your 'future plans'. You will be hearing more about this soon – ask your Personal Adviser for details.

6. Participation in society

A big part of staying mentally and physically healthy is enjoying hobbies and interests.

Keeping active

Through your Pathway Plan, we can support you to get involved in sporting activities or other leisure activities near where you live.

Your Personal Adviser will have lots of details of clubs, community groups, and activities that may interest you – ask them for details.

Having a vote

If needed we can help you enrol on the electoral register, this is important so you can vote in Local and National elections, to have your voice heard.

We want to hear your views so we can improve the experience for other young adults leaving care.

Care Leavers' Group

You will be given the chance to get involved in our Care Leavers' Group. This can help to boost your confidence and add to your CV by:

- taking part in training professionals
- going on trips
- participate in workshops
- ...and much more!

7. Help to understand your history

Entitlements and accessing my files

We will help you understand your rights and work with you on your behalf, helping you access information about you and providing support if you need to make a complaint.

We have written case records of your care history, which we must keep for 75 years. You can ask to see your records any time after you become 18 years-old.

You don't have to read through the information on your own, and we strongly suggest you don't do this alone as it can be upsetting or confusing. Your Personal Adviser can support you, or you can bring a friend.

You need to request to see your records in writing. We must then respond to you in writing, giving you a timescale for the viewing the files. It must happen within 40 days.

You may find some of the information is not available for you to read. This is because some of the information in your records may identify other people, known as third parties. Also, any information that could seriously harm your physical or mental health may not be given to you.

8. Our commitments in Thurrock

Getting ready for adulthood:

- we will help you with the changes that happen when you stop being a child who is 'looked after' and become a young adult leaving care – we will do this in a supportive and positive way, making sure that you have the time it takes to be ready
- we will help you remain with your foster family for as long as possible – we will only start thinking about independent living with you when you are practically, mentally and emotionally ready
- we will help you maintain relationships with your carers, family, friends and social networks so that you have help and support during and after you leave our care
- we will help you to understand what you need to be able to successfully live on your own and to be happy – we will also show you that we understand that leaving our care is a big step and that you need our patience and understanding, even when you make mistakes

Practical help:

- we will make it our priority to help you to find and keep a safe and welcoming home – we will make sure you understand and take part in making your personal housing plan
- we will help you learn how to take care of yourself, stay healthy and safe, manage your money, take care of your home, go to school, college or university, find a job, and have good relationships, able to raise families of your own if that is what you would like to do
- we will understand that just because you become 18 – this does not mean you will suddenly know all there is to know about being a responsible adult, but we will help you to work out what being a responsible adult means, support you when you make mistakes and when we feel worried about you, and we will make sure especially during the tough times, that we stand ready to help you
- we will make sure that we see you every month (more regularly if we can) and more often when you first leave our care – we respect your choice to see us less if that is what you would like
- we will help you to understand how to deal with conflicts and challenges without getting angry and frustrated at others or making things worse – we will help you through our own example, being patient and understanding, and when things don't go according to plan we will help you make a plan B to fall back upon
- we understand that as an adult you may make choices that are not good for you and may even mean that you are unsafe – we know that you are free to make such a choice, but we will always act to help you to protect yourselves and others around you, which means there may be times that we need to make contact with other services or people who can help you, but if we need to do this we will make sure that you know and are clear about what will happen next
- we will help you to find special support, like therapy or counselling, when the time is right for you and if you tell us that this would help you
- we will make sure that you feel part of our Thurrock "Corporate family" and like other families, we understand that you need to have a sense that you belong and are valued – we will help other people in the council understand this when you may need their support, for example with housing or other services

Our relationship together:

- we will always help you dream and aspire to be better than you are today
- we will help you to believe that you will continue to grow and to succeed
- your pathway plan will be something that inspires you to achieve great things in your life, whatever that means for you
- we will always listen to you, even when we don't agree with one another
- we will hear you out and help you to speak your mind in a way that helps you be heard by others who need to listen
- we will include you in all of the important decisions that need to be made about your life and your future
- we will respect the times when you need some personal space or may not be ready to see or speak with us – we will always leave the door open so that you know you can seek us out when you are ready to receive our help or advice, and you will receive help and support from us up until the age of 25
- we will make sure that your current social worker or personal adviser does not leave you without saying goodbye and introducing you to the new adult who will be supporting you – all our new personal advisers will understand that getting to know you and to earn your trust will take time
- we will help you identify the triggers that may lead you to become angry, lash out, hurt yourself or turn to drugs or alcohol to cope, and we will help you plan for these situations and identify who you can turn to for help when you need it – if it is helpful, we will help you to make a safety plan so that you have some control at times when you feel vulnerable and worried
- we will not make commitments to you unless we know we can honour them – we know that our honesty will be important if you are to trust and work with us, which may mean sometimes we have to say things to you even when it may not be what you want or like to hear
- we will help you to understand your history and how it is you came to be in our care because we recognise that having your life story book, pictures and mementoes are all important to your recalling important people and events in your life – we will support you if you find this upsetting and, if you want to see your case files, we will make sure that your personal adviser is available to help you read through papers and to ask questions
- we will make sure that you understand your rights and your responsibilities, and this will include knowing who else can help you to express your views if you want to make a complaint because you feel you have been treated unfairly – if we are not able to keep these commitments to you, we understand that this will mean you may need to complain
- we will always offer you a hug or a shoulder to cry on if that will help – it's OK for you to say no though

We ask you to make the following commitments to us, which we believe will support you:

- listen to and think about our advice and guidance, even if you don't always follow it
- let us know if you feel we are treating you unfairly or if we have made a mistake – we would like a chance to make things right
- accept our support, and let us know when you don't want or need our help
- understand that we have to make decisions about your safety when the law says we must or when you are in danger
- apologise and take responsibility for your actions when you make mistakes
- keep working hard on your goals, dreams and ambitions to the best of your ability
- be open and honest with us as much as possible
- tell us what your views, wishes and feelings are on anything we do to help
- let us know if you are in trouble or making decisions that are not good for you

So we can have the best relationship together through these commitments, we ask you to:

- try your very best to treat us with respect, even when you don't agree with suggestions we are making
- keep in touch with us as much as you can or feel comfortable with

Other useful information

On the following pages you can find out about the:

- **Charter for care leavers in Thurrock** – our principles and promises to care leavers
- **Care Leaver Covenant** – a pledge to support all young adults leaving care
- **Local Offer to care leavers** – what the law says

Charter for care leavers in Thurrock

Our charter for care leavers was written jointly with a group of young people. It is a set of principles and promises to care leavers.

We will respect and honour your identity

We will:

- support you to develop your own identity, respect your background and accept your culture and beliefs
- treat you as an individual, taking into consideration your own values and personal needs

We will believe in you

We will:

- support you to pursue your goals in whatever ways we can
- believe in you, celebrate you and help you overcome limiting barriers

We will listen to you

We will:

- respect and strive to understand your point of view
- be honest with you and place your needs, thoughts and feelings at the heart of all decisions about you

We will support you

We will:

- do our best to support you in achieving your goals, dreams and aspirations
- provide you with the support that you require with education, training and employment to succeed in life

We will help you find a home

We will:

- keep you safe and well by working alongside you to help you find the most appropriate place to live and prepare you for independent living
- do everything we can to prepare you for a smooth transition to adulthood and help you to be where you want to be

We will inform you

We will:

- point you in the right direction and journey alongside you at your own pace
- help you to be the driver of your life and not the passenger

Care Leaver Covenant

Thurrock expects all young adults leaving care to have the same opportunities for education, employment and training as children growing up in their birth families homes.

Have you heard about the Care Leaver Covenant? www.mycovenant.org.uk

The covenant is a pledge made by public, private and voluntary organisations to support all young adults leaving care to be successful. What does this mean I hear you say – well, in a nutshell, it details many exciting opportunities for young adults leaving care to apply for from employment work with placements and internships with big businesses, government departments, museums, theatres, or Premier League football clubs, as well as training workshops or life-skills coaching.

In addition to the private and voluntary sector offers of support, the package of support for young adults leaving care includes:

- 12-month internships from every government department in Whitehall, including one hundred 12-month internships from January 2019
- support from universities, such as bursaries and accommodation, with Cambridge, Leeds, and Manchester universities committing to supporting care leavers – data shows that only 6% of care leavers aged 19 to 21 go on to higher education
- resources and tools from Barclays Life Skills to help care leavers to manage their money better, as they often lack the safety net of financial support from their families

Watch this space for developments on this and how Thurrock expects to be able to 'offer' young adults leaving care local opportunities.

It could not be easier to access, through the free to download app, Care Leaver Covenant App.

What the law says about the Local Offer for Care Leavers

The **Children and Social Work Act 2017** says:

- (1) A local authority in England must publish information about-
 - (a) services which the local authority offers for care leavers as a result of its functions under the Children Act 1989;
 - (b) other services which the local authority offers that may assist care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living.
- (2) For the purposes of subsection (1), services which may assist care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living include services relating to-
 - (a) health and well-being;
 - (b) relationships;
 - (c) education and training;
 - (d) employment;
 - (e) accommodation;
 - (f) participation in society.
- (3) Where it considers appropriate, a local authority in England must publish information about services for care leavers offered by others which the local authority has power to offer as a result of its functions under the Children Act 1989.
- (4) Information required to be published by a local authority under this section is to be known as its “local offer for care leavers“.