

Support for care leavers resource pack

Foreword

Striking out into the world on your own for the first time is exciting and daunting for all of us. The opportunity to carve your own path and the newfound independence is a huge draw. On the other hand, learning to budget to keep on top of the bills, remembering to put a wash on in time so you have clean clothes for work on Monday morning, and managing to keep the fridge stocked, let alone keeping yourself healthy – it's a huge learning curve for any young person.

It's even more difficult for those without supportive families to fall back on, or for those who can't stay at home for other reasons. Those who have grown up, or spent time, in care don't always have the luxury of a family home to return to if something goes wrong, or a parent to phone when they aren't sure how to fix a problem.

That's where we come in.

As corporate parents to care leavers, it's our job to make sure that these young people are ready for what's next, know they're supported as they take those first steps into independence, and to help them access the same opportunities as their peers have – without worrying that if they make a mistake, they won't get another chance.

We need to give them the practical, social and emotional support that any good parent gives their child. From help to find the right accommodation, to guiding them through job applications and interviews, to making sure they know where to turn if they're having trouble.

We also need to make sure we're listening. If we can really hear what care leavers are telling us about their needs, dreams and ambitions, we can make sure we're giving the right support to help them get there.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 extended support for care leavers by clarifying in law our role as corporate parents, by giving care leavers access to their personal advisers until the age of 25, and legislating for the publication of local offers to make sure every care leaver knows what help and support they can get.

In reality, many councils have been doing much of this work for some time, and we've included some excellent case studies in this pack to highlight the good work already taking place. Much of the good practice doesn't take a lot of money to implement – it's more about making sure we have the right culture, and understanding what's best for the care leavers in our areas so that we can shape our services, and work with our partners, appropriately.

Our responsibilities don't end when a child leaves care, and getting them right is the best way of making sure we set young people on the right path to a settled, successful and happy adulthood.

Councillor Judith Blake

Chair, LGA Children and Young People Board

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Support for care leavers

An introduction

What is a 'care leaver'?

A care leaver is a young person aged 16-25 who has been looked-after for at least 13 weeks in total since the age of 14.

Those who are aged 16 or 17 are 'eligible' (still looked-after) or 'relevant' (no longer looked-after) children. Those aged 18-25 are 'former relevant children'.

The Government has outlined five key outcomes that it wants to achieve for care leavers¹:

- better preparation and support to live independently
- improved access to education, employment and training
- stability, and to feel safe and secure
- improved access to health support
- financial stability.

Some young people will return home rather than remaining with foster carers or moving on to independent living, but the council still has responsibilities towards them as care leavers.

Statutory responsibilities

The statutory responsibilities of councils are set out in the Children Act 1989, including through amendments made by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and the Children and Families Act 2014.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 made additional provisions for care leavers, and outlined in law for the first time what it means for a local authority to be a good corporate parent. Councils have responsibilities towards care leavers until they are 25.

The seven corporate parenting principles introduced by the 2017 Act are aimed at complementing existing practices, embedding a positive culture and ensuring that all the different service areas and leadership are doing what they can to support this group of young people.

The principles are:

- to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, 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
- to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

Personal advisers and pathway plans

The local authority must complete an 'Assessment of Need' for the young person leaving care, and make sure that a pathway plan is in place by their 16th birthday. Discussions with other partners may also need to take place to make sure the needs assessment shapes a pathway plan that is both meaningful and purposeful.

The pathway plan should look at how best to meet the young person's needs to help them effectively make the transition from care to living independently, looking at areas including²:

- accommodation
- education and training
- financial support
- support to develop relationships
- life skills and employability
- access to support for health needs, including mental health
- contingency plans for support if independent living breaks down.

The plan also needs to take into account current and previous events in the young person's life so that potential risks can be identified and addressed.

It is important that the plan contains specific actions and deadlines, spelling out exactly who will take what action, and when. The plan should be reviewed at least every six months by a social worker or personal adviser (PA). It is not unusual for a young person to leave care at 16 years of age, whether to move on to independent living or to return to family or friends. Around 14 per cent leave care at this age, and it is therefore essential that pathway plans be developed in a timely manner.

This will make sure that if a young person is considering leaving care at 16, they know what support is available to them, know what their future options are, and have a plan to help them move on to independence successfully.

A PA should be appointed to support the young person and implement and monitor the pathway plan. Under the Children and Social Work Act 2017, this PA should be available to work with the young person until the age of 25.

The PA acts as a focal point for the young person and can help with practical and emotional support, needed to make a successful transition to adulthood. Local authorities should ensure that all care leavers know who their PA is and how to contact them. Where possible, care leavers should have the same PA from when they leave care until they no longer require support.

Financial support

Care leavers aged 16-18 are entitled to financial support to meet their education, training and employment needs, as well as help to pay for things such as accommodation, food and clothing.

Those aged 18-21 are entitled to living expenses associated with living near their place of work or where they plan to work, along with help with education and training.

Care leavers are entitled to a £1,200 bursary if they stay in full-time education, or £2,000 if they go to university. From August 2018, care leavers have also been entitled to a £1,000 bursary if they choose to do an apprenticeship.³

Care leavers can also ask the local authority for £2,000 towards setting up home, making sure that they have the equipment and household items they need to set up safe, secure and stable accommodation.

Accommodation

Care leavers must be provided with appropriate accommodation for their needs. This should be discussed as part of the pathway plan well before the young person is due to leave care.

Councils should avoid moving and disrupting young people who are settled, offer a choice of accommodation (where practicable) and provide a support package to go with the accommodation. There should also be a contingency plan in case accommodation arrangements break down.

Any care leaver under 21 who spent at least one night in care when they were 16 or 17 is automatically considered to be in 'priority need', if they become homeless or are at risk of homelessness.⁴ From the age of 21, they may also be in priority need if they are vulnerable because they were previously looked-after – for example, if they have not had a stable home since leaving care. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 also stipulated that a young homeless care leaver should be treated as having a connection to the area that they were looked-after. This will make it easier for them to get support in the area in which they feel most at home.

In April 2018, councils were given new and strengthened powers to offer advice and assistance to homeless people, including care leavers, in their area.⁵ Despite these initiatives, homelessness amongst care leavers continues to be a concern.

Staying in touch

Councils should attempt to stay in touch with all of their care leavers to monitor progress on their pathway plans, and plans should outline how frequently that contact should take place.

When a care leaver moves to new accommodation, their PA must see them at that accommodation within seven days of the move. After the first subsequent review of the pathway plan, they must visit the care leaver at no less than two-monthly intervals.

In some cases, care leavers may decline the support of the council. This should be respected, however periodic attempts should continue to be made to remain in contact. If a young person's situation changes, they need to know that support is still available, and refusing support once doesn't mean that it won't be available in the future.

Staying put

'Staying put' is an arrangement that allows a looked-after child to continue to live with their foster carer – whether a local authority carer or an independent fostering agency (IFA) carer – after their 18th birthday, when they cease to be 'looked-after' by the local authority. This can take place where the council considers it appropriate, and both the young person and the carer want to enter a staying put arrangement.

The council has a responsibility to monitor the arrangement and provide advice and support (including financial) to the foster parent, and the young person to facilitate the arrangement until the young person reaches 21.⁶

Staying close

A number of councils are trialling approaches to 'staying close' – a variant of staying put for young people leaving residential care – using funding from the Department for Education's (DfE) Innovation Programme.

The scheme sees care leavers living independently in accommodation close to their children's home. This would see them continuing to have the support of a key worker from their previous home, and they could visit the home frequently. A full evaluation is expected in 2020.

Local offer

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires local authorities to publish a local offer for care leavers, with guidance⁷ recommending this be reviewed every two to three years. This should include all services offered by the council that can support care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living. This includes both those that the authority is legally obligated to provide, such as 'staying put' and housing support, and universal services such as careers advice or public health services. The offer can also include relevant services provided by other organisations, where appropriate. Care leavers should be consulted before the offer is published.

Access to Information

Under the Data Protection Act 1998, care leavers have a right to access their care records, to better understand their care history and decisions made during their time in care. Councils must facilitate any request made and have a transparent policy in place to support this. They should also work with partners who may hold relevant information. Councils should keep these records for a minimum of 75 years from the date of birth of the adult care leaver and consider suitable retention and storage processes.⁸

Care Leaver Covenant

The Government has introduced the Care Leaver Covenant. This aims to encourage public, private and voluntary sectors to pledge support, and make specific offers to support care leavers aged 16-25 in living independently.

The covenant links care leavers to offers which can include:

- discounts
- financial support
- exemptions
- personal development
- workshops
- training
- work experience, apprenticeships and internships.

The covenant can be used by councils to support and extend their local offer, and trials are underway with six councils to identify how it can best be used to support care leavers. A toolkit is being developed for councils and will be available in early 2020.

Key lines of enquiry for all councillors

What do we know about our care leavers – both existing, and coming up?

It is important that the council knows as much as possible about care leavers and their needs to make sure that plans can be made to effectively meet those needs. Care leavers are statistically more likely to have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and are more likely to suffer from mental health problems. It is therefore important that sufficient provision be available for those care leavers who need additional support.

It is also important to treat each young person as an individual. Many care leavers will have no such difficulties and, like many young people, will be focussed on achieving their potential through work, training or higher education. Like any good parent, councils should consider the specific ambitions of individual young people and aim to provide the tailored support they need to fulfil them.

There have been growing numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) entering the country in recent years. If your council is looking after unaccompanied children, they may have very specific needs that must be catered for to help them prepare for and adjust to independent living, whether in the UK or in their home country, and to fulfil their potential. Similarly, your council may be looking after foreign-national children who are not necessarily asylum-seekers, but may have immigration issues and links to other countries.

Nationally, young people are also starting to come into the care system at an older age; the council should know whether this trend

applies to its area, and account for this when planning services.

How are we making sure that the voice of the young person is heard and reflected in the pathway plan?

Pathway plans should include clear, specific actions to drive care leavers' progress, and identify support to help them find and sustain education, training or employment. Different young people will have different ambitions, plans and concerns, so it is vital to make sure pathway plans are very specifically tailored to each young person. This will help them to develop their independence and meet their goals at a pace that suits them.

Every young person should be fully involved in the development of their pathway plan. Make sure that arrangements are made for this, including in the case of young people placed out of area, those in custody and those who may need support to communicate their needs effectively, for example, those with certain learning difficulties or disabilities.

Feedback from care leavers – whether through a care leaver's forum or directly – will be key in identifying whether they feel that their voices are being heard, and what improvements could be made. Independent reviewing officers (IROs) have an important role to play in checking that this has happened, and will be able to report on how effectively young people are influencing their pathway plans.

What are care leavers telling us?

The council should have a variety of methods for obtaining feedback from care leavers, for example care leaver councils or collating information from PAs. Regular reports on this information to the corporate parenting panel will help to spot issues early and make sure they're addressed, with the voices of care leavers considered in relevant decision making. In particular, the council should assure itself that care leavers feel safe, understand that they have someone they can talk to if there are any problems, and that they feel supported and listened to. The proportion of care leavers that the leaving care service is still in touch with should also be monitored. Councils should be striving to maintain contact with all care leavers up to the age of 25.

How are we making sure that young people are able to take advantage of 'staying put'?

All young people in foster care should have access to staying put arrangements. Whenever a long term placement is being considered, there should be discussion between the foster carer and the child's social workers about the possibility of it leading to a staying put arrangement. The young person should, however, not have to decide whether this is something they wish to do until they are ready.

Young people living with IFA carers should also be able to stay put. Make sure that commissioning arrangements with IFAs allow for this possibility; staying put is not a fostering placement, so arrangements will need to be separately negotiated.

Both care leavers and foster carers need access to good information about staying put so that they fully understand the arrangements; make sure that both groups know where they can get the advice they need.

Councils will also need to consider what arrangements are in place for looked-after children who are not in foster care – for example, those in residential care – to support them when they have left formal care.

Do we have a suitable range of accommodation options for care leavers, and how are they supported in each? What happens if something goes wrong?

Different care leavers will have different needs, so there should be a range of accommodation options available to give care leavers the appropriate support. Bed and breakfast accommodation is not considered suitable. While some young people may be able to take on a flat with minimal support from the council, others may need 24/7 access to support. Making sure that options are available to smooth the transition will increase the chances of a care leaver successfully settling into independent living, and reduce the chances of them becoming homeless.

There will need to be close working between the lead member for housing and the lead member for children, as well as between their respective departments. This will make sure care leavers' accommodation needs are catered for. Councils in two-tier areas will need to develop and maintain strong links with their district councils, who have responsibility for housing. This will make sure that the needs of care leavers are being taken into account in housing plans and housing allocation; what arrangements are in place for this, and how well are they working?

Having a fall back option – an emergency place to stay if things go wrong – can be a big comfort to care leavers. Most of us know that if something goes wrong, we've got somewhere to go, and someone who can work through problems with us even if it's not the first time.

Offering this to care leavers reduces the pressure on them, and is part of being a good corporate parent.

Care leavers up to the age of 21 are exempted from recent housing benefit reforms, meaning that they are not limited to the shared accommodation rates as most other young people are. However, there is still significant competition for affordable social and private rented accommodation in many areas. Consideration should be given to how care leavers will access this accommodation, for example, through allocation schemes, or by identifying particular private landlords to work with personal advisers to provide care leaver accommodation. How are care leavers helped to prepare for when this exemption ends at 21?

How are we preparing care leavers to live independently?

One of the biggest issues raised by care leavers is that of isolation – without a strong and stable social network, it can be extremely hard to navigate life after leaving care. Some councils are already looking at ways in which they can help care leavers to develop social networks, while efforts to ensure stability of placements and school throughout care are also positive. This allows young people to spend time developing friendships and local connections. Some care leavers find it helpful to be in touch with fellow care leavers; are there opportunities for this in your council?

Practical support to develop life skills will significantly ease the transition for care leavers. In particular, teaching about budgeting will make it easier for young people when they need to start managing their own money, while making sure that children in care are learning to cook healthy meals will help them to look after themselves later on. Encouraging young people to help with household tasks, take on weekend jobs and allowing them increasing independence will all develop important skills to make the move to independent living less daunting.

Some local authorities have given council tax exemptions to care leavers to help them with their budgets as they adjust to living independently, while others have introduced budgeting courses so that care leavers understand what to expect when managing their own tenancy.

Care leavers should also have easy access to key documents and information that they will need when taking on tenancies or starting work. Examples of these could be a birth certificate, National Insurance number, passport and examination certificates.

The local offer is an important source of information, and it should reflect what care leavers say they need. When this is being developed, find out what care leavers said in the consultation, and what changes were made as a result. Having a clear local offer will make it far easier for care leavers to know what is available to help them to live independently.

It is also important to update the local offer regularly, in consultation with care leavers, to ensure that it is responsive to their changing needs.

How are we working with our partners to support care leavers?

The Government wants to improve access to mental health provision for care leavers, as well as more general improved accountability for the local provision of health services. The NHS has a responsibility alongside councils to act as a corporate parent to care leavers,⁹ and should be considering their needs in the development of plans and commissioning of services. Councillors can influence the design and funding of local NHS services through engagement with sustainability and transformation partnerships.

Your council should be represented on your local partnership through the director of public health or another senior lead.

Joint health and wellbeing strategies are developed by local leaders to enable planning and commissioning of integrated services to meet the needs of the local community. This will include reducing health inequalities and supporting the needs of vulnerable groups. These plans should include specific consideration of how partners will work together to support care leavers. Delivery of the strategy should also be monitored by the health and wellbeing board. Health scrutiny committees provide further opportunities to look at whether health services for care leavers are sufficient and appropriate.

There will be particular partnership considerations for young people leaving custody, who are at greater risk of becoming homeless, and are likely to have a range of specific needs for support including help with employment, training, or mental health. There should be strong joint working relationships and protocols between the leaving care service, the Youth Offending Service and the probation service to start making plans well ahead of a young person's release. The young person's voice and needs must be at the forefront of planning.

A national protocol has recently been introduced to encourage councils to work with partners to reduce unnecessary criminalisation of looked-after children and care leavers.¹⁰ It may be useful to consider the local arrangements and specific support in place for care leavers.

How do we help care leavers to find, and remain in, employment or further education and training?

While 62 per cent of care leavers aged 19-21 are already in education, employment or training and achieving well, this still leaves a significant minority who are not.¹¹

Improvements are being made, for example, through the promotion of apprenticeships and further education, but clearly councils have a key role to play in making sure that care leavers have a clear path to follow to live independent lives.

Councils have approached this in various ways, from establishing partnerships with local businesses, to encouraging apprenticeship providers to actively consider care leavers, to providing training positions within the local authority. Personal advisers can support young people as they develop their pathway plans to find routes to achieve their goals, including applying for university places or finding jobs or traineeships. Universal careers services should also be involved in supporting care leavers to consider what they want to do after compulsory education has finished.

Bear in mind potential barriers to opportunities – care leavers might worry about where they will stay during university holidays, how they will get to a job outside their town, or whether they can support themselves through an apprenticeship. Check that it is easy to find out about financial and practical support available for all options, and that these are discussed with care leavers well in advance of key decision points.

How are we promoting the care leaver covenant?

The Care Leaver Covenant aims to engage a range of partners across sectors to improve outcomes for care leavers. Councils may therefore wish to consider how they can promote and engage in this, for example:

- raising awareness of the covenant amongst council staff and partners
- offering ring-fenced apprenticeships, internships or work experience opportunities for care leavers
- revising the social value policy to ensure that apprenticeships, internships and work experience specifically for care leavers are a standard part of procurement practices
- working with local businesses, employer groups and other partners to increase the number, range and take up of education, employment and training (EET) opportunities for care leavers.

The covenant advocates a 'whole council' approach to this work, recognising that the responsibility for being a corporate parent does not solely reside with children's services.

Are we being good corporate parents to care leavers?

Being ambitious for young people does not stop when they leave care. Find out how many care leavers the council is still in touch with – regular contact with care leavers will help to make sure they are in education, employment or training (or getting support to do so), managing their money and accommodation well, limiting the risk of homelessness, and that they are looking after their health and wellbeing.

Care leavers also need to know that the council is still ambitious for them, helping them to achieve goals in their pathway plans and working with them so that they can reach their potential.

Every councillor and officer across a local authority has a responsibility as a corporate parent to care leavers. This needs to be acknowledged across all levels of the organisation, and all corporate parents should prioritise the needs of care leavers.

For more information on corporate parenting, please see our 'Corporate parenting' resource pack.

How are we ensuring that the corporate parenting principles are being applied to care leavers?

The aim of the corporate parenting principles is to provide leadership, challenge and accountability at every level and ask probing questions to ensure that care leavers are well supported. The Corporate Parenting Panel and Scrutiny Committee have a role in monitoring how the principles are being applied, what the barriers are and how the local offer for care leavers can be improved.

How are we making sure care leavers have access to services they need for their health and wellbeing?

Care leavers are statistically more likely to need mental health support than young people in the general population because of the trauma and neglect that they may have experienced. So check what arrangements have been put in place to make sure they can get help if they need it. For young people with a need that meets the threshold for CAMHS (child and adolescent mental health services), find out what arrangements are in place for a smooth transition between children and adult services in your authority. Issues that do not meet the CAMHS threshold, for example, depression and anxiety, are likely to be treated through public health interventions such as online support, or through provision from GPs. Consider the

criteria for access to mental health services; do care leavers receive any priority access, and how are they told about this? The local offer is a good place to signpost to support services, including advising that GPs can help with mental as well as physical health – which some young people may not know.

While the majority of care leavers will have no such problems, the difficulties some have faced in their lives mean that, without proper support, they can be more likely to experience substance misuse problems or teenage pregnancy. A third of young people leaving care report problems with drugs or alcohol within a year¹², while a quarter of young women leaving care are pregnant, and nearly half become pregnant within two years.¹³ Access to drug and alcohol prevention and treatment services, sexual health and family planning services, should be well promoted. Data on take-up of these services, along with anonymised user feedback, will help to identify whether those services are operating effectively or need to change to meet young people's needs.

All of these issues fall within local authority public health responsibilities. When budgets are being set, consider what services are prioritised, the potential impact on care leavers and make sure you are satisfied that any risks to provision are adequately mitigated. For example, if a drug prevention service is to be reduced, are the remaining sessions in locations and at times that are accessible to care leavers, and will that provision be enough?

Physical health is also important. Care leavers should know who their GP and dentist are and how to make appointments. Support with prescription costs is available for those on certain benefits or on low incomes – care leavers may need to be made aware of this, and how to fill out prescription forms to ensure they receive this entitlement. Councils might also look at what support they can give to help care leavers look after their health, for example, access to leisure centres or support to keep up activities that they started in care.

¹² Ibid

¹³ HM Government, 'Keep On Caring: Supporting Young People from Care to Independence', July 2016

Are there particular considerations for unaccompanied asylum-seeking care leavers?

The 2016 Immigration Act removes the automatic right to support for an unaccompanied asylum seeking child following their 18th birthday. As they approach their 18th birthday, these young people must apply for extended leave to remain in the UK. This can be an extremely stressful time for young people, and it is important that they be supported through the process.

Councils can claim up to £200 per week to support care leavers who were supported as unaccompanied children and have leave to remain in the UK. They can also claim this support for care leavers awaiting the outcome of their asylum claim, or who are on their first appeal.

It is important that pathway planning for unaccompanied children takes into account a young person's immigration status; while most unaccompanied children are granted refugee status, humanitarian protection or another form of leave to remain, the decision-making process can be lengthy, leaving the young person in a difficult position to plan ahead. Engagement with the Home Office on asylum claims should be timely. Furthermore, work on the pathway plan should take into account both a potential future in the UK, or plans to leave the UK and resume life in the young person's home country if they have no lawful basis to remain.

It should be noted that those awaiting a decision on an asylum claim are not allowed to work. Pathway plans should be clear on the support available to the young person, and safeguard against potential risks, for example, informal work in poor conditions, or modern slavery. The risk of the young person going missing should also be considered when agreeing how often they will be in contact with their personal adviser. For more information, the Local Government Association (LGA) has worked with the Independent Anti-Slavery

Commissioner to produce a council guide to tackling modern slavery (see key resources and further reading).

Are there particular considerations for other children in care with immigration issues?

Some children in care may have immigration issues but have not applied for asylum. For example, these children can be foreign-nationals who were removed from their families due to neglect or abuse, or who came to the UK with their families and were abandoned here. In some cases, the child might be stateless, or might be eligible for British citizenship but their citizenship application has not been made. As with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, it is important that the child's immigration status be considered in any care plan, assessment, and pathway planning. Support, including legal advice, should also be provided so that the child can have the most secure status possible in accordance with their plans.

Do we have processes in place for adult care leavers to access information about them?

An adult care leaver can ask their local authority at any time for information about their care records. So it is important to have systems and processes in place to enable them to do this smoothly and effectively. Some of the information that adult care leavers may read about their history in care or the way in which they came into care may be traumatic. Is support available to help people through this?

Case studies

City of York Council

City of York Council has a strong track record of supporting young people leaving care; a strength highlighted by Ofsted in its report published in February 2017. The inspectors acknowledged that, by listening to care leavers' views and shaping services around them, York now sees the vast majority of care leavers living in accommodation that suits their needs, with low numbers not in education, employment and training, and most making a successful transition to adult life.

This transition starts with developing a pathway plan at the care review nearest the young person's 16th birthday. This gives two years to put the right plan in place – whether that involves staying with a foster family beyond the 18th birthday ('staying put') or moving into independent living, and education, training or employment. Each case is referred to a personal adviser (PA) when the young person is 17. PAs generally manage caseloads of around 21, helping them know each young person well and make sure they get the best possible support to experience a smooth transition into the leaving care service.

The pathway team is well connected with information, advice and guidance services and the virtual school. This has resulted in the proportion of care leavers in education, employment or training being well above the national average. Two new programmes are being introduced to increase this proportion further, improve career information and support care leavers with learning opportunities.

Teaching life skills is a key element of preparing care leavers to live independently. A pathway life-skills toolkit supports carers

and key workers to make sure young people get the right level of help to develop those skills; which include saving money, budgeting and cooking for themselves. Young people are encouraged to remain with their foster carers after their 18th birthdays to continue learning life skills with them as part of the staying put programme, while those in supported housing benefit from personalised support to build their life skills and confidence at a pace that suits them.

Staying put is an option for all care leavers. Those in residential placements outside York are increasingly moved back to the city before their 18th birthdays so that they can take up this option which is part of a strategic initiative to 'Make York Home' for all young people in care. Staying put also includes young people fostered by connected persons or kinship carers, and those placed with independent fostering agencies. Acting on feedback from young people, those who stay put are encouraged to start work, or to get a Saturday job if they are in education, to make life as 'normal' and as like any other family as possible. As one young person commented, "I'm learning to handle money better as I pay board and pay my own phone bills", while another said they enjoyed "feeling part of a family". Those who go to university can return to their foster carer each holiday.

The option of a four-week stay in a 'taster flat' gives care leavers the chance to experience independent living. They know that they have support throughout their stay there as they develop their life skills before returning to their placement to work on any areas of development and consider what to do next. Accommodation options are varied to suit different needs. Some care leavers might

choose to go into a trainer flat with support from the pathway accommodation officer and pathway worker. While others who need more support might opt for supported lodgings with charity SASH or permanently-staffed hostel accommodation, where they have a named key worker and access to daily education sessions and independence skills training. This variety of options allows for gradually increasing independence.

The focus on life skills and a careful transition into accommodation is paying off – the vast majority of care leavers are successfully living independently in suitable accommodation, with none in houses of multiple occupancy. Where there are difficulties, regular risk assessments mean that they are caught early, with creative support packages put in place to help the young person to get back on their feet and move forward. Where care leavers aren't keen to engage and things go wrong, emergency accommodation is also provided – there is always another chance available.

Building a programme of support that genuinely works for care leavers has been helped by social workers and support staff who listen to the views of young people. Care leavers told Ofsted that the council listened carefully, recorded their views well and – importantly – acted upon them. As a result, most were positive about the care and support that they received.

David Purcell, Pathway Team Practice Manager at City of York Council, said: “We’ve made a real effort to learn from our care leavers to make sure that we can give them the best possible transition into adulthood. It’s important that each young person in care can work with us to achieve their ambitions, and can do that at their own pace.

“Every child in York deserves a place they can call home, and to enjoy family life wherever possible. As the corporate parents to care leavers, that’s what we do our best to give them.”

For more information, please contact:
david.purcell@york.gov.uk

Royal Borough of Greenwich

The Royal Borough of Greenwich has been working with charity MyBnk to make sure care leavers get good quality financial education to help them when they move into independent accommodation. Care leavers moving on to supported housing all attend the week-long accredited ‘Money House’ programme as part of their pathway, spending a week with other young people in a real flat learning about everything from tenancy agreements and safe borrowing to budgeting and choosing utility providers.

Referrals are all considered individually to make sure needs are understood and catered for on the course, and the young people are all contacted to sort out logistics to make sure they can attend.

The results of its first year are impressive:

- 97 per cent felt more confident about their financial situation
- attendees are three times less likely to have rent arrear issues than their peers
- no one who has completed the training has been evicted
- 90 per cent of those who felt their ability to pay rent and keep their tenancy was below average or poor felt that this improved as a result of the course, with 80 per cent going on to rate their ability as good or excellent.

Anneta Corbin, Family and Young People Service Manager at the Royal Borough of Greenwich said: “Money management is a vital skill for young people when they move into their own accommodation. We know from our care leavers that the better the support they receive to build these skills, the more confident they feel about making that move. Feedback from our care leavers on the programme has been really positive, and we’ve found that those who have been on the course are much more likely to maintain their tenancies when they move on to independent accommodation.”

For more information, visit:
<http://mybnk.org/programmes/financial-education-the-money-house>

*The Money House has now expanded to Newham and is funded by the JPMorgan Chase Foundation, Berkeley Foundation and Hyde Housing.

Leeds City Council

A not uncommon challenge faced by young people leaving care and moving on into independent living and setting up their homes for the first time is getting practical support with things like decorating, plumbing in and setting up white goods, putting shelves up, and so on. These are things that many other young people moving on into independence might get support from their families to do. We work closely with our housing services within Leeds to provide suitable accommodation for young people making this first step, though often these tenancies require some degree of decoration and homemaking. Our experience has been that for some young people the condition of their new home can be variable and the desire to settle our young people into a personalised home can mean that we need to identify support to do this.

As a champion authority of the national Care Leavers Covenant, Leeds Care Leavers Services established a partnership with Engie Regen (Places and Communities Division). Engie Regen is the first private company to sign up as a signatory partner to the covenant, to provide a range of practical supports and offers directly to benefit care leavers. They are also long-standing ambassadors of 'Child Friendly Leeds', and have undertaken some fantastic work to support care leavers in Leeds. Such support includes redecoration, donation of paint, garden clearing, plumbing in washing machines, joinery and other practical home making support and DIY projects. ENGIE Regen are on target to complete 12 projects by December 2019.

This project has provided invaluable support to care leavers, allowing some to have their homes decorated to a high-quality professional standard and in many cases has enabled

young people to move quicker, feel settled and to feel a real pride in their new homes.

For further information, contact
joel.hanna@leeds.gov.uk

Hampshire County Council

It isn't unusual for a young person to have goals that might seem unachievable. However, as corporate parents, it's important that councils put the views and wishes of care leavers at the heart of their plans, and work with them to progress towards their goals while keeping alternatives in mind.

At the age of 16, Rob was in the care of Hampshire Children's Services. He didn't engage in education, was using alcohol and was working with the Youth Offending Team following an assault charge. He did, however, show a flair for boxing, continuing to attend training even as he failed to show up for education or work. His hobby was supported by his foster carers, social worker and personal adviser. A pathway plan was developed that allowed him to follow his ambition to become a professional boxer, while encouraging him to take up opportunities with local colleges as alternative options.

As Rob started to win more local and UK title fights, his drive and commitment so impressed the children's services team that they sought out ways to acknowledge and reward his progress and encourage him further, as any good parent would do. This included helping with travel costs to fights, allowing him to travel abroad to a training school for a month, and then supporting him when he took the decision to move abroad to embark on a professional boxing career. A weekly allowance was also allowed, and goods were sent to help him set up home.

When Rob showed a desire to further his own education by learning the language of the country he competed in most frequently, Hampshire helped him to pay for a language course; his dedication to learning means he is now fluent in that second language.

Thanks to the flexibility, support and encouragement offered by Hampshire Children's Services and everyone else working with Rob, he is now a professional boxer who no longer drinks or smokes, and is living a successful, independent life.

For more information, please contact:
cathi.hadley@hants.gov.uk

Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council

Listening to your care leavers is the perfect way to find out what can really make a difference to them – and it isn't always complicated. In Trafford, the care leavers' forum highlighted that their £57.10 per week benefit had one key problem – it left £7.10 each week that couldn't be withdrawn from the cash point. The point was raised with councillors, who agreed that raising the benefit to £60, which could be withdrawn in £10 denominations, made far more sense. It was also noted that the extra £2.90 could pay for two day's gas in a young person's flat, or cover a chip supper treat. Care leavers were delighted with the response, which showed that they were genuinely listened to and that their corporate parents cared about their lived experiences.

On another occasion, a care leaver raised with Trafford Council that it didn't feel fair for him to search for work or training while his fellow care leavers could still get their benefits without making the same effort. The council therefore decided that the importance of getting care leavers into education, employment or training made it worth providing an incentive. The Corporate Parenting Board agreed an incentive of up to £30 a week for care leavers who were actively engaged – which could cover anything from work experience, to visiting a job centre, to working with their personal adviser. They could also get a free weekly bus pass to help them carry out these activities. The overall package was worth more than £100 to care leavers who actively worked towards

improving their own outcomes, and has proven extremely popular. Seventy per cent of Trafford care leavers are now in education, employment and training – higher than the national average, and a positive indicator of how care leavers are supported by the council.

For more information, please contact:
aftercare@trafford.gov.uk

London Borough of Islington

Islington's leaving care service, Independent Futures, works with care leavers and 16 to 17-year-olds in care to provide a holistic service that prepares and supports them as they move towards independent living. The service has sought innovative ways to help care leavers to make sure they're in a strong position when they leave care. Support includes establishing support networks, providing mental health support, and helping with finding further education and employment.

A key concern of young people when they leave care is around the support networks they will have when they are no longer 'looked-after'. The Grand Mentoring Scheme pairs care leavers with a 'grandparent' who mentors the young person, and provides support and guidance as they move into adult life. This gives them someone independent from the council that they can rely on for help, and who they can build a stable relationship with as they take on greater independence.

Independent Futures has also teamed up with a wide range of local partners from the public, private and charity sectors to give care leavers access to employment and training opportunities. We have an enhanced offer that enables those who wish to attend university to be able to do so with the support of services and additional financial allowances. The variety of partners reflects the range of young people looked-after by the council, providing a broad spectrum of possibilities to show them how much is possible.

East Riding of Yorkshire Council

The council also works closely with partners in the arts and performance sector to give young people a way to develop their sense of identity and personal achievement, promoting the confidence and resilience that they'll need as they move into work, as well as raising aspirations.

Supporting the physical and mental health, and wellbeing of care leavers is paramount. Well-used weekly drop in health sessions make sure care leavers can get advice when they need it, while free counselling and advice commissioned from a local mental health charity allows them to get support quickly if they find themselves struggling with mental health difficulties. We have also recently embedded clinicians within the service and introduced a specialist mental health social worker within the service in recognition of the level of need some of our young people present with. Regular liaison between CAMHS and adult mental health services ensures continuity of provision for those care leavers who have specific emotional health needs. Where young people need to visit specialists, young people's advisers offer to attend with them for moral support and to make sure they can attend the appointment. We are keen to offer early intervention and encourage young people to make use of personal health budgets (Choice and Control) to improve their mental wellbeing.

Councillor Kaya Comer Schwartz, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families, said: "Young people when discussing their care experience, have told us that forming and maintaining relationships is important to them and we are committed to being their lifelong champions. We work hard to ensure that we reduce any barriers to them being involved and achieving their full potential. Our revised offer to care leavers reflects this as well as the passion and commitment we as a council have for our care leavers."

For further information, please contact stephen.rice@islington.gov.uk

When Ofsted rated support for care leavers at East Riding of Yorkshire Council as 'outstanding', it confirmed one of the pathway team's core beliefs – that getting the basics right, and really understanding what works, are key to making sure that care leavers have a positive experience and make good progress.

Staff working with care leavers know the importance of stability and relationships to children in care, so the pathway team starts working with them in Year 11 to carefully manage the transition from looked-after child to care leaver. Care leavers also work with several members of the team to make sure there is always someone who they can talk to, and who knows them well enough to provide the right kind of support.

Each member of the pathway team has an average caseload of 15, giving them the time to dedicate to each care leaver, while managers work hard to make sure staff have all they need to do the best possible job. This includes an excellent range of training to cover the types of issues young people may face, including the dangers of radicalisation and self-harm.

East Riding has also set up a post-16 sub-group of the virtual school to make sure care leavers' needs are being met and to raise aspirations among both the young people and the service providers. The group is chaired by the pathway team manager, and includes further education colleges, training providers and Jobcentre Plus. Care leavers are given highly supportive mentoring and specialist advice about their potential options as they progress into further or higher education, training or employment. This strong partnership working at all levels has led to the authority having 69 per cent of care leavers engaged in education, employment or training, higher than similar authorities and the national average.

Pathway Team Manager Sue Smyth said:
“One of the most important things that we do is to gain care leavers’ trust, and show them that we’ll support them, no matter what. We’re always keen to try new ideas, but we make sure those basic relationships and core support are never compromised, because they’re the foundations for a strong service. Our care leavers tell us that they feel safe, and that they wouldn’t be where they are now without our support – and that’s the most important thing for all of us.”

For more information, please contact Sue Smyth: www.eastriding.gov.uk

Key resources and further reading

Barnardo's and St Basil's Care leavers accommodation and support framework, 2015

Children and Families Across Borders
www.cfab.org.uk

Department for Education, Children Act 1989 Statutory Guidance: Transition to adulthood for care leavers, October 2010 (updated January 2015)

Department for Education, Department for Work and Pensions, and HM Revenue and Customs, Staying Put guidance, May 2013

Department for Education, Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers, February 2018

Department for Education, Extending personal adviser support to all care leavers to age 25: statutory guidance for local authorities, February 2018

Department of Education, Home Office, Ministry of Justice, National protocol on reducing the criminalisation of looked-after children and care leavers, November 2018

Fostering Network, Staying Put: Guidance for children and young people services, fostering services and leaving care services, September 2017

HM Government, Keep On Caring: Supporting young people from care to independence, July 2016

House of Commons Library: Support for care leavers: Briefing Paper, March 2019

Local Government Association, Tackling Modern slavery: A council guide, December 2017

www.local.gov.uk/modern-slavery-council-guide

Local Government Association, A councillor guide to tackling modern slavery, September 2019

www.local.gov.uk/councillor-guide-tackling-modern-slavery

Care Leaver Covenant
www.mycovenant.org.uk

The Children's Partnership, Staying Put: Good practice guidance, 2014



Local Government Association

18 Smith Square
London SW1P 3HZ

Telephone 020 7664 3000

Fax 020 7664 3030

Email info@local.gov.uk

www.local.gov.uk

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