



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL
LOCAL OFFER FOR CARE LEAVERS



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Any questions or concerns about the contents of this document should be raised with the Quality Assurance and Policy Team via email at:

ImpactAndInspectionTeam@wokingham.gov.uk

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WHAT IS THE LOCAL OFFER FOR CARE LEAVERS AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Leaving care is a time of big changes in your life, and you will have lots of questions about the support you can get and the services available to you. In the local offer you will find information about services and support that Wokingham Borough Council will provide for you as a care leaver. It will help you to understand what support there is and who to go to for help and advice.

WHO WILL RECEIVE SUPPORT?

In general, to be able to get the help and support outlined in this document you must have been in care for at least 13 weeks between the ages of 14 and 16 (including on or after your 16th birthday) or for 13 weeks after your 16th birthday. If you're not sure, your social worker or personal advisor (PA) can help you work this out, or you can use [this tool](#)¹ from Coram Voice.

You will also receive our support if:

- You have lived or are living with a family member, relative or friend, under a Special Guardianship Order.
- You were adopted and you have come back into care for at least 13 weeks.
- You have been looked after for at least 13 weeks by Wokingham Borough Council as an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child.

The level of support we give you depends on **your age, when you were in care and for how long.**

There are four categories of care leavers:

You are an Eligible care leaver if:

- You are aged 16 or 17, and
- You were looked after by children's services for a period of 13 weeks since the age of 14
- You are currently looked after

You are a 'Relevant' care leaver if:

- You are aged 16 or 17, and
- You are no longer being looked after by the local authority, but you have been eligible.

¹ www.coramvoice.org.uk/myrights/all-you-need-to-know-about-leaving-care/i-am-care-leaver/

'Former relevant' care leavers:

- Are aged between 18 and 25
- Who were previously an 'eligible' and/or a 'relevant' care leaver

If you are an Eligible, Relevant, or Former Relevant care leaver, this Local Offer contains detailed information about the support available to you.

The support offered to Care Leavers who do not meet the requirements of the above may be eligible for a service as a 'qualifying care leaver'

'Qualifying' care leavers:

- Are aged between 16 and 25; and
- Were cared for young person prior to the making of a special guardianship order which was in place when they reached 18; or
- Were looked after by children's services on, or after, their 16th birthday and are no longer looked after; and
- Have spent less than 13 weeks in care since their 14th birthday, (i.e. they do not fulfil the criteria for 'eligible' or 'relevant' child); or
- Were privately fostered and assessed to be in need

If you are a qualifying care leaver you will not receive all the support outlined in this document, however you can be allocated a Personal Advisor who will support you with the below:

- Give you advice and support.
- Keep in touch with you.

If you are not sure whether you qualify for support, or if there is anything in this document you don't understand, ask your Personal Advisor.

WHAT IS IN THE LOCAL OFFER?

The Local Offer contains information about services which may assist in preparing for adulthood. This includes support with:

- Accommodation
- Education, training & employment
- Health & wellbeing
- Finances
- Relationships
- Participation in society

WHAT IS A PERSONAL ADVISOR?

A Personal Advisor (sometimes abbreviated to “PA”) is someone there to help and support you to develop a Pathway Plan (see definition below) as you move into adulthood. A Personal Advisor will be allocated to you at the age of 17 to work alongside you and your social worker to prepare you for adult life.

At the age of 18 you will no longer have a social worker, but just a PA who will be there to support you.

WHAT IS A PATHWAY PLAN?

Your Pathway Plan is a plan that sets out your needs, views and future goals, and identifies exactly what support you will receive from us. Your Pathway Plan will replace your Care Plan from the age of 16. We will review your Pathway Plan with you regularly so that it is kept up-to-date.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Wokingham Borough Council wants all children and young people to be healthy, and we want to make sure that you are able to get the help that you need when you want or need it.

Your Personal Advisor can advise and support you with information on healthy living. Your PA can also help you register with a **GP, dentist or optician**.

If you are struggling with your **mental health**, then there is lots of support available. Your PA can support you moving on from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to equivalent adult services and can also help you with accessing other mental health support in the area. Remember we are here to help.

We can give you information about **counselling services** that are available in your area. We can also provide information about **health drop-in centers and sexual health clinics**, and support you to access sexual health advice, guidance and contraception when needed. We can give you information and support in relation to **LGBTQIA+ matters**.

Your PA can also help you with a referral to **local drug and alcohol services** for young people.

SUPPORT WITH HEALTH APPOINTMENTS

- Under 18s will be supported to access regular doctor, dentist and optician appointments.
- Under 18s will be supported to purchase glasses if required.
- Care leavers will be supported at appointments if requested by the care leaver.
- Your PA will support you to find a new doctor and dentist when you move.

HEALTH PASSPORT

All care leavers will receive a Health Passport. This is a small booklet which contains information about your health history and present medical conditions, like birth details, your immunisation history and lots of other useful health information.

- Your health information will be given to you at your last Child in Care Review.
- You will be offered a last health review with a nurse before you are 18 to discuss your health history.

ACCESS TO LEISURE SERVICES

To help you stay healthy we can help and support you in accessing a range of leisure services. For example:

- Access to local gyms in the Wokingham area.

- If you are out of area, then access to a local gym can be arranged up to £30 per month.
- We can support you to access local clubs e.g. sports clubs.
- We can also offer support with purchasing equipment for sporting activities

RELATIONSHIPS

We know that relationships are really important to our children in care and care leavers. We will support you to have meaningful contact with the people that are special to you.

Your Personal Advisor will be able to support you and point you in the right direction for getting the right help at the right time.

We can offer you support to understand your life story and care experience. We can do this at your own pace. This can include support with requesting your records, being alongside you as you read these documents to provide you with emotional support, and/or writing you what is known as a later life letter.

You will also be offered the opportunity to **complete life journey work**.

MAINTAIN AND STRENGTHEN IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIPS

We will also support you to maintain and strengthen important relationships:

- We can support you with the costs of visiting family members up to the age of 18.
- If your family members are abroad, we will support you to have phone contact with the people that are important to you.
- Where appropriate we can help with referral and support to access an independent visitor: If you are under 18 years old and you do not see your family very often, then you can have someone called an independent visitor, who will come and see you. They will be there for you to talk to, will offer help and advice, and may take you out to places.
- A reunification assessment will be explored if you want to return to parents, family or a connected person before you turn 18.
- You will be supported to manage your family relationships in a safe way, as adults.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

We will encourage and support you to be able to study, train or work.

To support you whilst studying or training the following incentives are available:

- We can provide you with a laptop. This is a 3 yearly offer whilst you are studying.
- We can provide funding for school trips for those who are under 18.
- We can help with the purchase of equipment for courses e.g. hairdressing kit
- We can support you with one hour a week of private tuition in Maths and English (up to GCSE).
- We can support you in applying for education bursaries.
- We offer £25 on completion of GCSEs or equivalent qualifications.
- We offer £50 on completion of A levels and equivalent qualifications.
- Care leavers are also supported by the virtual school with some course fees.

VIRTUAL SCHOOL

Wokingham Virtual School (WVS) acts as a Local Authority champion to promote the progress and educational attainment of children and young people who are or who have been in care so that they achieve educational outcomes comparable to their peers. The virtual school is an additional learning resource and works with your school to ensure you are getting any extra support you may need.

Examples of what the Virtual School can help you with are:

- A laptop to support education or job searching, which can be replaced every 3 years up until you turn 25.
- A block of Maths and/or English GCSE tuition for exam retakes (or English language tuition for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children).
- Access to careers advice from our Post-16 Officer.
- Personal Education Plans and Personal Education Plan meetings termly are offered to those in education, if they would like it.
- Support for UCAS applications or for access to other courses on a case-by-case basis.

UNIVERSITY

If you would like to go to university, we will help you with university fees, travel and we will make sure you have somewhere to live both at university and during the holidays. Your Personal Advisor will be able to tell you all about this.

We offer the following for undergraduate students:

- Support with attending open days, either in person or through travel costs.
- Support with moving to university.
- Up to £5000 for accommodation during term time.
- £1200 for accommodation during holidays.
- Termly £1000 living costs.
- £500 yearly equipment grant for books and other items.
- £2000 national grant.
- Up to £1200 a year for travel to and from university.
- £100 on completion of a degree.
- Up to £300 towards the cost of a graduation gown.

Your PA will support you with applying for student finance, loans and/or bursaries if needed, and can also support you in setting up bank accounts.

Your PA will also have contact with the care leavers lead at your university to ensure you are receiving what you are entitled to. Your PA can also liaise with student welfare and Student Finance England.

EMPLOYMENT

We can help you seek careers advice, prepare a CV and find a job.

We will also help you build the confidence to be able to attend job interviews or start a new course.

We can offer the following **additional financial support** with (preparation for) employment:

- Support with costs for interview clothes.
- Support with costs to travel to a job interview if needed.
- Support with travel to work for the first month if not in walking distance.
- Support with fees gaining industry accreditation, for example a CSCS card or equivalent.
- In some circumstances we can support you to purchase equipment to ensure you are ready to start your job. e.g. work boots.

ELEVATE WOKINGHAM

We help care leavers to prepare for employment by offering monthly drop-in sessions with 'Elevate' - a service that seeks to help young people find a job, training or an apprenticeship.

The **Elevate**² Team provides information, advice and guidance to young people in Wokingham, who are not in education, employment or training (and young people aged up to 24 with SEND), covering career planning, education, jobs, apprenticeships, training opportunities, work experience and volunteering.

² www.wokingham.elevateme.org.uk/

ACCOMMODATION

Wokingham Borough Council believes that you should always have a roof over your head and a safe place to live, in or out of the area. We will work to make sure all care leavers have somewhere suitable to live and to call home, based on their individual needs and circumstances.

If you're between 16-17 years old this could mean with a foster carer or in supported accommodation.

When you reach 18, if you wish to, you can often continue to live with your foster carer, under what is called a '**Staying Put**' arrangement. This will be discussed with you and your foster carer to see if it is possible. You will have to pay rent and an amount towards bills. This can be covered either through housing benefits or your wages. Make sure you discuss this option with your Social Worker and Personal Advisor.

If you're over 18 years old we'll give you advice and support in helping you find a suitable place to live. Don't worry, as you will have a Personal Advisor to help you every step of the way.

You will only be offered a place to live independently when you can prove you are ready to live alone as it is a big step to take and we want you to succeed.

OUR AIMS FOR CARE LEAVERS IN WOKINGHAM

Our aims are that care leavers in Wokingham:

- Are given as much information, choice and control as possible before they leave care and in the first few years of being young adults.
- Have help and support to sustain their tenancy.
- Have help and support available to meet their needs, regardless of where they live.
- Have help and support to learn how to manage their money.
- Do not experience homelessness.

All the details about how Wokingham Borough Council will help care leavers, in terms of finding somewhere suitable to live and making sure young people have the support needed to live more independently, are contained within Wokingham's Joint Housing Protocol document. We have summarised some of the information for you in the section below on planning options for accommodation.

WHO WILL BE INVOLVED IN PLANNING OPTIONS FOR ACCOMMODATION?

There are a lot of people who can be involved and support you with housing options. A social worker, Personal Adviser and Young Person's Homelessness Prevention and Housing Needs Officer will assess the different housing options for you based on what your personal circumstances and views are.

Examples of other people who can be involved are your carer, the Independent Reviewing Officer (up to the age of 18) and any other people you would like to have involved.

WHAT OPTIONS ARE THERE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHEN THEY LEAVE CARE?

The social worker, the Personal Adviser and Young Person's Homelessness Prevention Officer will look at the options for you.

If you do not want to return to Wokingham, for example because you have lived in a placement outside the area, the housing options may be different for you. Your social worker, Personal Adviser and the Young Person's Homelessness Prevention Officer will give you a realistic overview of the housing options available.

The variety of options which may be available are:

- 'Staying Put' with former foster carers
- Living in a supported lodgings arrangements with a host in their own home
- Living in a Shared Lives placement in a family setting – this is only for care leavers with additional needs (mental health, physical disabilities, learning disabilities)
- Living in a supported housing scheme
- Living in 'step-down' housing, linked to a supported housing scheme, but with more independence
- Living in self-contained social housing
- Living in a private rented tenancy (shared or self-contained)
- Returning to live with family
- Living away at university and needing vacation accommodation

PREPARATION FOR LIVING ALONE

We want you to succeed and we will help you as much as possible to prepare for living alone.

We can help you prepare for living alone in the following ways:

- You will be invited to workshops so that you know more about being able to live independently successfully.
- We will help you with learning how to budget your money.

- We will help you to make sure you know about all the bills you will need to pay if you are in independent accommodation such as water, gas and electricity; helping you avoid getting into arrears by helping you to resolve problems on time.
- We will make sure you know how to make appointments.
- We can refer and signpost you to other agencies who may be able to help you (This can include tenancy sustainment officers, Transform Housing & Support (a local charity), or local faith-based charities).

WHAT OUR SUPPORT WITH ACCOMODATION FOR YOU INCLUDES

- We will make sure you know how to apply for any benefits that you are entitled to so you can pay for food, rent and bills.
- We can help you get access to a rent deposit scheme if you are eligible (which is a loan).
- We can provide you with a Leaving Care Grant of up to £2,000, which is used to set up your home so you can afford basics like furniture, a bed, washing machine and furnishings.
- We will give you practical support in helping you to move in, look after and maintain your home.
- We will offer you advice and support about managing your money and your tenancy (the agreement between you and your landlord).
- We can help by paying your TV license for the first year.
- We can help you hire a van to support you with the move.

Care leavers, up to the age of 25, can be exempted from paying council tax. To be eligible to apply for Care Leaver Council tax exemption you will need to:

- Have been looked after by Wokingham Borough Council.
- Be a Former Relevant Care leavers as defined above
- Be a care leaver liable for Council Tax on a dwelling within the Borough of Wokingham
- Recorded as liable to pay Council Tax.
- If you live alone, you will be awarded a 100% discount.
- If you live with one other person who is also liable to pay the Council Tax, then the reduction will be 50%.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Your PA can advise you and help you understand what financial support might be available.

Examples of support that might be available are:

- A £60 personal allowance can be paid whilst you are waiting for your benefit claim to process or are waiting to start employment.
- Discretionary financial support depending upon your circumstances.
- Help with accessing an Individual Savings Account if you are eligible.
- A single point of contact for care leavers is available at the Job Centre.

We can support you to access recourses in the local community.

We can also support you with a range of personal allowances, for example:

- You will receive £50 birthday money up to the age of 21.
- This will be £100 on your 18th and 21st birthday. Your PA will support with purchasing a special present for your 18th and 21st with the £100. e.g. jewellery.
- If you are 16/17 and living in a semi-independent home, you will receive a £60 per week allowance.
- Between 16 and 18 you will receive £10 per week clothing allowance.
- If you are living in foster care at 16/17 years of age, you will receive £25 per week pocket money - this includes money for toiletries.

Child Trust Fund or Junior ISA

All children who have been consistently in care will have either a Child Trust Fund or a Junior ISA account. This account is managed by the Government until you are 18 years old. It is not possible to withdraw money until you are 18. Your PA can give you more information about Child Trust Fund and Junior ISA accounts. Your PA can also help you manage the money when you turn 18.

PARTICIPATION IN YOUR COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY

CULTURE, ETHNICITY, IDENTITY, YOUR PAST, HOBBIES AND INTERESTS

We will help you to follow your culture, identity, interests and hobbies.

Activities: We will support you to take part in activities that you have got an interest in, and we will give you information about groups and activities in your area that you may wish to join.

Celebration of achievements: Your individual achievements will be recognised and celebrated, for example with a celebration meal. We will also support you with a Christmas dinner, and a £50 festival allowance for religious festivals.

We have a dedicated care leaver space available:

- You will have access to Here4U.
- There is a dedicated Children in Care Council website which is full of information and resources.
- You can access free Wi-Fi at Here4U.
- Here4U run events throughout the year. These include workshops, a BBQ, national care leavers week activities and an outdoor activity event.

Identity documents: we can give you financial support with passport / a travel document and/or birth certificate fees. We can keep a copy of your ID documents at the office. We can also support you with opening a bank account, and can help you to join the electoral role so you can vote.

Support with learning to drive: we can support you with the costs of driving lessons, your first driving theory test, first driving test and the costs of your provisional license. Alternatively, we can support you with Compulsory Basic Training for a moped.

PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT WITH THE COUNCIL

Your views, wishes and experiences are important to us, and we want to ensure all Care Leavers' voices are heard by the people making the decisions. This helps us understand how we are doing and how our services are impacting you.

We have several opportunities for you to participate, meet with the Lead Member for Children's Services and (senior) officers, or work on plans for the future of Children in Care and Care Leavers.

Children in Care and Care Leavers have the opportunity to meet with the Lead Member for Children's Services on a regular basis. This gives you the chance to share your thoughts, and your ideas can help improve your experience and those of others in Wokingham.

Participation: There are frequent Children in Care and Care Leaver **activities and events**, where you can meet with other care experienced young people, take part in activities and have fun.

We also have a Children In Care Council, a group of young people who represent the voice of all Children in Care and Care Leavers in Wokingham in relation to their rights and entitlements. The aim of the CIC Council is to ensure young people in care have a voice around issues that matter to them and ensure all their voices are heard by the people making the decisions. There are frequent CIC Council meetings where you can come along.

Internships and Apprenticeships for Care Leavers: We understand employment opportunities are important for Care leavers. We offer a Summer Internship programme for a Care Leaver with the council, and we aim to establish more internships for Care Leavers in the future. We are also researching the possibility to offer Apprenticeships for Care Leavers.

If you are interested in taking part in activities or events, meeting our Lead Member, becoming a part of our Children in Care Council, or would like to enquire about apprenticeship opportunities, please discuss this with your PA.

IDENTITY

LGBTQIA+: we will offer support and guidance for care leavers to explore LGBTQIA+ identity and we can provide referrals to support services. This can include GP appointments and attending local pride events.

Race and Ethnicity: we know that it can be important to our young people to explore their family's heritage and culture. For those who want to learn more about their heritage, we will support them through this journey and ensure that those supporting you understand the things that are important to them and their identity.

Religion, cultural identity: we will support care leavers to understand their heritage, and to follow the things that are important to them.

Care leavers who are expecting a baby or have children: Our PAs can give advice regarding maternity grants and benefits, and can help care leavers with a referral to gain parenting support if needed. We can also help with finding nursery placements, or help with a referral for a larger property.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People: we can offer unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people a range of support options, including emotional support, support with immunisation if needed, support with Home Office meetings, translators for all meetings, support making referrals to relevant agencies, support with obtaining documents and latent TB testing if required.

Care Leavers in custody: We will offer care leavers support if they are detained in custody. Our PAs will have contact with the relevant care leavers lead in prison.

Housing and Children's Services will work together in Wokingham to ensure that care leavers leaving custody will have suitable accommodation on release and that there is support available to assist them in keeping their accommodation. Planning for resettlement on release will start on a care leaver's arrival in custody. Our PAs can provide more information about this.

Religion: We can offer support to find local places of worship, and financial support to purchase religious items such as prayer mats and bibles.

Care leavers with special educational needs and/or disabilities: Wokingham Borough Council has a specific offer for all 0–25-year-olds with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This offer can be found on our website. Your PA can give you advice and help you participate in planning, making choices and developing your life as an adult.

Wokingham SENDIASS can provide young people with SEND with free, confidential, impartial advice, guidance and support relating to all aspects of SEN and Disabilities, including Health,

Social Care and Personal Budgets to children and young people up to the age of 25 and their parents/carers.

KEEPING SAFE

- We want you to be safe and to ensure you have somewhere suitable to live.
- We will support and encourage you to make safe lifestyle choices.
- If you have got into trouble with the law, we'll continue to support you. If you are in prison, we will visit you and support you to make the changes you need to make sure you live a healthy, happy and safe life.
- If you are struggling with drug and/or alcohol use, we will work closely with other agencies who can support you with this.

OUR PROMISE TO YOU AS A CARE LEAVER

We will:

- ✓ Support you to find a home.
- ✓ Support you to be able to study, train or work
- ✓ Help you have a healthy lifestyle.
- ✓ Make sure you have fun.
- ✓ Respect you, listen to you and take what you say seriously.
- ✓ Help and support you as you become young adults.
- ✓ Never forget about you.

A Thank you

Some of Wokingham's care leavers were given the chance to tell us what and how they need help, to make becoming an adult easier.

Their feedback, and the involvement of the Children in Care Council, has shaped our local offer and we would like to thank them all for taking part and giving us their views.

We want to continue to listen to our care leavers views to make sure our services meet your needs, rather than our views of what you need, so we would love to hear from you if you have any ideas of your own.

You can contact Here4U on 0118 908 8386

Copies of this document can be provided in large print, easy read, Braille or in other languages. Please telephone 0118 9088386 and ask to speak with a Personal Advisor for an alternative format.