
**Bath & North East
Somerset Council**

**LOCAL OFFER
FOR CARE LEAVERS**

2018

BANES LOCAL OFFER FOR CARE LEAVERS GETTING YOU READY FOR ADULTHOOD

Foreword by Cllr Paul May

You have been in care to support and help you and now you are getting older we want to make sure that you have the best opportunity in your adult life. Everyone reacts differently whilst being in care, but the Key is that you are an individual and we want you to flourish when you become independent. It is not a switch where one minute you are in care and the next you are not. We recognise this and want to help at this time of transition, right through until you are 25. You are an individual and you may need more or less help, but we really want to keep in touch because we care about you.

The purpose of this Local Offer is you make it as clear as possible about the help that we can all give, what you are entitled to and how you get the information that you need.

Our vision as Corporate Parents is:

We want all our children and young people to be safe, happy and healthy and to enjoy life. We will give you the care and support you need to be resilient and well prepared for adulthood and independence.

We will provide you with high quality care, support and guidance to ensure you get the opportunities you deserve.

Cllr Paul May

Our Values and Principles are:-

Respect and honour your identity

Believe in you

Support you

Listen to you

Help you to find a home

Inform you

Help you to find work

Purpose of the 'Local Offer'

Bath and North East Somerset's Local Offer for Care Leavers informs you about all the support that we have in place for you as a care leaver. We know that it is a big step when you move out of care and start living on your own or with friends.

Just because you are leaving care, or have already left care, we have not stopped caring about you. We want to make sure that you feel safe and supported and know where and who to go to for advice and help.

To be able to get the support set out in our Local Offer, you need to be a care leaver. Please see page 23 on how you become a care leaver.

If you are not sure you qualify as a care leaver, please ask your Personal Adviser or Social Worker in the Children in Care and Moving on Team **01225 396930**.

We have written this 'Local Offer' with the help of the South West Care Leavers Forum and we will continue to listen to your views to make sure the services we offer are what you need.

This Local Offer is available will be available online meanwhile you can email leavingcare21to25@bathnes.gov.uk

Preparing to Live Independently

Statutory entitlements – what the law says you must be given if you are a young person in care or a relevant young person

If you are 16 – 17 you can expect

Your Social Worker will write a Pathway Plan with you. In the Plan you should discuss what you need to help you live independently in the future.

This will happen around the time you are 16 if you are in care at that point. We will work with the people who can offer you support to learn life skills in how to take care of yourself such as:

- ✓ How to buy enough food for the week and pay your bills with the money you have
- ✓ How to cook and make meals from the food that you buy
- ✓ How to make sure you know how to eat healthily so that your diet helps you to be fit and well
- ✓ How to take care of your accommodation (being clean and tidy, washing your clothes, not allowing other people to mess up your space, getting on with Neighbours and Landlords, paying your bills
- ✓ If you are living independently at 16-17 we will talk to you about the support we can give
- ✓ Support you to open a bank account
- ✓ Apply for your National Insurance Number

You may have other needs which should also be in your Plan. If you find that they are not, then please talk to your Social Worker. It is important that you do not sign the Plan until you are happy that it covers what you think it should.

The Plan should be reviewed twice yearly (i.e. every 6 months). It is your Plan. Make sure you know and understand what is in it.

If you are not happy with the support and Plan, please talk to your social worker, if you are still not happy you can access the Advocacy through Shout Out and/or the B&NES complaints procedure. Ask your social worker for details.

If you are 18 – 21 you will have Advice and Support from a Personal Adviser

At the age of 18 you will be appointed a Personal Adviser who will work with you until you are 21. There may be circumstances where the PA will support you for longer.

Your Personal Adviser is there to help and support you when you are ready to live independently. The Pathway Plan you completed with your Social Worker will continue as a Pathway Plan Review Post 18 with your allocated Personal Adviser. They will talk with you about what support you feel you need and record this in your Pathway Plan Review which will be reviewed with you every six months or sooner if there are significant changes in your life.

The amount of support that you receive from your Personal Adviser will depend on what you agree with your Personal Adviser.

You may need extra support, such as if:

- You have special educational needs or a disability.
- You are an unaccompanied Asylum Seeking young person (UASC) and your immigration status is unclear.
- You are in or leaving custody or you have had contact with the criminal justice system.
- You are a young parent; or
- You are going through a difficult time in your personal life.

If you are 21-25 we are now able to offer a service which will be based on an assessment of your need

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

A Personal Adviser will assess your needs and provide a Pathway Plan

setting out the support to be offered.

This could be a need for a specific service which may come from us or you will be given advice and signposted to the relevant services.

We will help you contact the right service to enable you have the support you need.

Every year we will send you a birthday card up to your 25th birthday to remind you of our service.

ADVOCACY

Your right to be heard and taken seriously

You have a right to be involved in all decisions about your plans for leaving care. You have a right to support from an independent advocate if you want to challenge decisions about the support we give you.

Having someone around to help you say what you want can make things easier.

An advocate can:

- ✓ Give you information and advice so you understand your rights
- ✓ Make sure people listen to you and know what's important to you
- ✓ Help you speak out at your reviews or other meetings

Your advocate will listen to you and may also help you to make a complaint if you wish to do so.

Advocates are independent and separate from Children's Services. In Bath and North East Somerset, the Children in Care and Moving on Team work alongside:

Shout Out! Advocacy Service

For more information about Shout Out! Click on the link <http://offtherecord-banes.co.uk/our-services/shout-out/>

For more information about Complaints Procedure Click on the link

<http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/services/your-council-and-democracy/complaints-and-customer-feedback/complaints-about-childrens>

For young people who are seeking asylum they should have access to a solicitor with the necessary qualification to promote their application to remain in the UK. Your social worker or PA or foster carer will help you attend appointments.

ACCESS TO RECORDS

You have the right to access your records

You have the right to access your records. We keep these records for 75 years.

You can request to access your records yourself or through other people, such as a Solicitor or an Advocate, although it is likely that we will ask that they prove that they are acting on your behalf.

You will need to request access to your records in writing and we must respond to you within 1 month. However, where there is a large volume of information and if any of the points listed below come to light, we may extend the timescale by a further 2 months.

If we decide to do this, then we must tell you within 1 month of the time you requested access to your records.

Although you have the right to be given access to the information about you, there is some information we may not disclose. This can be the case if:

- The information on file identifies other people (called third parties). In these cases the information will be removed or given in a way that does not identify these people. The information must be given to you if the third parties have agreed for the information to be passed to you.

- Giving you the information would seriously harm your physical or mental health or that of another other person.

If you wish to access your case records you should first discuss this with your Social Worker or Personal Adviser about how you can do this.

ACCOMMODATION

A Place to live

We will support you to stay in care until you are 18. Most young people still live at home with their families at this age.

If you leave care before age 18, the law says we must offer you suitable accommodation. This means that it has to be right for you and above all, safe.

If you return home before 18 you will keep your 'Relevant' care leaver status for the first six months that you are living at home. If you stay living at home and don't come back into care, you will be a qualifying young person.

Your last LAC Review prior to your 18th birthday should ensure that there is a clear Plan, covering where you will live and the support you will need Post 18. Your social worker will work with you to agree plans for when you are no longer in care, including accommodation in your Pathway Plan.

When you are 18 you will have the responsibility of paying your rent whether you are 'staying put' with your carer, in supported lodgings, or in your own place.

What the law says we must do:

- ✓ Listen to your wishes and feelings
- ✓ Appoint you a Personal Adviser
- ✓ Assess your needs
- ✓ Prepare your Pathway Plan with you
- ✓ Review your Pathway Plan

- ✓ Up to the age of 18 we will find you somewhere suitable to live
- ✓ Pay for your accommodation up to 18
- ✓ Give you money for your subsistence
- ✓ Keep in touch with you
- ✓ Visit you regularly

As Corporate Parents we are committed to making sure that once you leave our care we help you find suitable and safe accommodation. Your Personal Adviser will help you access your setting up home allowance i.e. your leaving care grant. An allowance of £1,500 with an additional contingency allowance of £500 if needed over time. Young people moving into supported living may need part of this allowance. Unused allowance may be retained and paid to young people up to their 25th birthday.

When you move for the first time into your own accommodation you can access up to £30 to help with additional costs (e.g. food).

From April 2018 care leavers living in B&NES will be exempt from Council Tax and in order to access the exemption you will need to discuss with your PA how to apply. If you have a partner you will need to speak to your PA about eligibility. This policy applies to care leavers up to their 25th birthday. For care leavers not living within B&NES you will need to make contact with the Local Authority of your residence to determine whether they have an exemption policy in place. Your PA can assist with this. If that Local Authority does not have an exemption policy in place, B&NES will pay £150 towards the first year of Council Tax.

Options for accommodation could be:

Staying Put Arrangements

If Staying Put with your foster carer Post 18 is what you and your foster carer(s) want and agree, we will support you to remain with foster carers under what is called a 'Staying Put' arrangement. This can last until you are aged 21. After this it may become a private arrangement between you and your carer.

Staying Put is to enable you to gain skills so that you can succeed in your next steps around your independence. This will include paying rent from your income whether this is benefits or from working.

The expectation is that you will be working, studying or both and working on your independent skills. You will need to contribute to your living cost as part of learning to manage and take responsibility for looking after yourself. Your social worker will support you in making your Universal Credit claim at 18.

Supported Lodgings

If it is not possible for you to stay with your carer another option maybe supported lodgings. You will still be living in a family home and having the additional support that comes with being part of a family but with some independence and with a supported lodgings provider.

You will also need to contribute to your living costs. This can come from your earnings and/or your benefits. The expectation is that you will be working, training, studying or both. Like the Staying Put arrangements, you will need to pay a contribution towards your keep plus rent. This may come from your income or from the Housing Element of Universal Credit if you are eligible. This will need to be paid directly to your provider. You may be able to stay with your supported lodgings provider(s) up to the age of 21, this may be able to be extended.

Housing help for care leavers: Housing Options Team Support

Living by yourself is a big step – we can help you consider your options and decide what is right for you. If you have nowhere to live, have been evicted or at risk of losing your home we will try to help. We'll agree a personal housing plan with you with steps to take to help find somewhere to live, or prevent you losing your home. Find out more by calling 01225 396296 or visit us in the One Stop Shop. You can visit our housing pages on the Council's website www.bathnes.gov.uk/housing for our opening times.

Living by yourself

Depending on your age and circumstances, you may wish to live on your own in a flat which you rent.

Renting a home from a housing association can be affordable, but it is in high demand because there's simply not enough for everyone. It will usually take a number of years before you get a place to live, but the sooner you join the scheme the better your chances are of getting somewhere because the person who will be given a home first will be the person in the most need and has waited the longest. Apply via www.homesearchbathnes.org.uk

Renting from a private landlord can be a quicker route to finding somewhere to live, but it can be confusing if you've never lived by yourself before. Speak to our private rented officer on 01225 396296 she'll talk you through the process, including getting help to pay the rent, a deposit and furnishing your home as well as your responsibilities as a tenant and those of your landlord.

Living with other people

Living with someone else is a good stepping stone to having your own place. You can learn in a supportive environment about paying bills, how to run a home and get help to access work and training. Apply for a house share, a foyer or a hostel via www.housingsupportgatewaybathnes.org.uk

If you feel you need more support then consider Supported Lodgings. You will live with a family but have more independence than a foster home and the provider will help you develop the skills to live independently.

Apply via your personal adviser or 01225 477802.

Emergency Housing

Becoming homeless is scary but there is help and emergency housing. Please speak to Housing Options on 01225 396296 as soon as possible. They could stop you becoming homeless and find emergency housing which will depend on your age and circumstances.

Click on the link below to see other housing and support options we have in Bath & North East Somerset:

<http://www.housingsupportgatewaybathnes.org.uk/Data/ASPPages/1/137.aspx>

As well as staying put and supported lodging options, your Personal Adviser will help you find other suitable accommodation. This will involve:

- Working with Bath & North East Somerset Housing Services to come up find suitable housing options for you, including supported accommodation, if you are not ready or don't want to have your own tenancy
- Support to access different independent housing options including social housing (this is accommodation managed by BANES housing or a housing association)

<http://www.housingsupportgatewaybathnes.org.uk/Data/ASPPages/1/137.aspx>

- Your Personal Adviser will help you to access your leaving care grant of £2,000, to enable you to set yourself up in your long term accommodation
- We know it can be very hard having your own place for the first time. We will do whatever we can to ease the pressures on you. Bath & North East Somerset Council have introduced a policy which means that care leavers living in Bath and North East Somerset don't pay Council Tax up to the age of 25. You will need to talk to your Personal Adviser who can speak to the Council Tax department on your behalf.

Education, Employment or Training (EET)

We want to make sure every young person leaving care has the support to achieve their goals and ambitions in life. In order to help you achieve we will assist you by:

- ✓ Careers Information and advice, such as help to develop your CV, advice about job interviews, including what you might wear.
- ✓ Support to meet your transport costs when travelling to training, school/college, apprenticeships or job interviews.
- ✓ We may support you to buy tools, equipment, essential clothing and books
- ✓ Support if you choose to go to University, see below.
- ✓ We will also ensure that you are able to access work experience, apprenticeships and other training and employment opportunities that improve your ability to get a job. If you're on an apprenticeship programme, or any waged training, you're classed as being employed, rather than in education and aren't eligible for the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund
- ✓ Personal Education Plan up to 19
- ✓ We may signpost you to a Skills and Employment Mentor or a Reboot Worker to assist you.
- ✓ Whilst you are in employment/training or University your Personal Adviser will continue to keep in touch and visit you regularly i.e. a minimum of eight weekly. They will listen to your wishes and feelings about how you want to keep in touch and what level of contact you want.

16 to 19 Education Bursary Fund

You can also access a bursary from your school or college if you are over 16 but under 19 on 31st August of the year of your course. Currently this is £1,200 per year. You can be studying full or part time. Your education provider will look at the amount of time you're studying when they're deciding if you will get a payment and how much you will get.

There are 2 types of 16 to 19 bursaries:

- ✓ You must be enrolled on a study programme that's publicly funded. Your education provider will check if your study programme meets the conditions.

- ✓ If you're studying on a publicly funded distance learning course you will probably not have the kind of costs the bursary fund is designed to cover, like transport, equipment and uniforms. If you do want to apply, you should talk to your education institution. They will look at your individual case and let you know if you might be eligible for help.
- ✓ If you go to an independent education provider that charges fees, you won't normally get a bursary. However, if your local authority has referred you to the education provider and they pay your fees, you may be able to apply. You should talk to your education provider about this.
- ✓ If you have to pay more than £600 travelling to College in an academic year, we will pay the rest provided we have agreed on the cheapest way to get to College.

Your Social Worker or Personal Adviser will support you in making your application.

Higher Education Funding 18-21 year olds

- ✓ If you are going to University, your PA can help you apply for student loans and grants.
- ✓ If you let the University know you are a Care Leaver, they may give you a bursary plus access to other funds to reduce fees etc.
- ✓ After you have registered for each academic year for University, we will give you a £2000 bursary. Payments may be made over the academic year rather than a one off.
- ✓ In addition we will give you maintenance (at Universal Credit rates) and rent in the University holidays. We use the holiday dates taken from the University's website.
- ✓ We will provide you with travel costs at the start and end of each term if needed.
- ✓ We want you to succeed in your education, training and employment. We will ask you how you are doing and be ready to celebrate your achievements with you. We may need to check that you are still enrolled at your University.

21 up to 25 year olds wanting to go into education or training

You can get in contact with us over wanting to return or have returned to education or training Post 21 for advice and assistance. We will assess your circumstances and offer support.

Under the Local Offer we will contact you once a year and check if you are wanting our advice and assistance which maybe about returning to education and training.

You will be given advice and support to consider your options through the Duty Leaving Care Service. You may be signposted to relevant services, assessed for a Post 21 Leaving Care Service which may lead to you being allocated a PA.

If allocated, your Personal Adviser will create with you a Post 21 Pathway Plan which will focus on:

- ✓ You have a reasonable prospect of completing the course successfully
- ✓ The course is likely to significantly improve your employability
- ✓ Bursaries, grants and loans have been thoroughly explored from all sources including charities.

Your Personal Adviser will support you in accessing the financial support offered by Colleges and (Higher Education) to care leavers such as reduced course fees and bursaries.

We will offer you the same Higher Education package of support as for 18-21 year olds (see Higher Education 18-21 year olds).

REMEMBER - We want you to succeed in your education, training and employment. We will ask you how you are doing and be ready to celebrate your achievements with you

We will:

- ✓ Listen to your wishes and aspirations
- ✓ Assess your needs
- ✓ Prepare your Post 21 Pathway Plan with you
- ✓ If you are in education we will appoint you a Personal Adviser
- ✓ Review your Pathway Plan
- ✓ Support you finding somewhere suitable and safe to live
- ✓ Pay for your accommodation and maintenance during University vacation periods
- ✓ Keep in touch with you and visit you regularly i.e. at least eight weekly

STAYING HEALTHY

What you can expect to receive

You will continue to have health assessments annually until your 18th birthday. These will be carried out by the LAC Health Nurse. At your final health assessment you will be given a 'Health Passport'.

Your Health Passport is a very important document, as it contains key information from your childhood (for example, when and if you have had immunisations) and your current health needs. The 'Health Passport' supports you through to adulthood.

For some young people leaving care there can be emotional issues which may be hard to deal with. Your PA can support you to access the right provision to help you, including accessing your GP.

It is important that you are registered with a GP wherever you live. Your PA can help you do this.

If you have a disability, you will receive services as a care leaver in addition to any services you may be receiving around your disability.

Your social worker can present your information to the BANES Transitional Panel from when you are 14 onwards to explore if you will need adult services post 18.

Your Social Worker and Personal Adviser can support you to stay healthy. Listed below is the support and advice you can expect to receive:

- ✓ Give you information on healthy living
- ✓ Give you information on getting help to pay for prescriptions
- ✓ Support you to register with a GP
- ✓ Support you to register with a dentist
- ✓ Support you to move from CAMHS to adult services
- ✓ Give you information about counselling services that are available locally
- ✓ Give you help with transport costs when attending health appointments
- ✓ Support available for young women who become pregnant through the neighborhood midwives team as well as family nurse partnership schemes to support young mothers
- ✓ We would want to support you to access services as a young parent
- ✓ Support with sexual health and contraception
- ✓ Your Personal adviser can support you to ask your GP to refer you to the mental health services
- ✓ Access to subsidised activities such as Gym.

RELATIONSHIPS

As well as support from a Personal Adviser, we may be able to offer you additional practical and emotional support such as:

- ✓ Providing you with an 'Independent Visitor' if available , and where appropriate continuing support with the Independent Visitor you had while you were in care

- ✓ Signpost to support services for 16-25 such as counselling services
- ✓ Help to maintain or regain contact with people special to you or who cared for you in the past, like former foster carers or social workers
- ✓ Support to re-connect with family where it is in your best interest.
- ✓ Help towards costs of maintaining contact with key people that are important to you as agreed in your Pathway Plans and Reviews.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

You may be able to get help if you:

- Are 16 or over and living semi-independently
- You are 18 and a care leaver
- Have no recourse to public funds

B&NES Savings Scheme

Bath and North East Somerset has a scheme to provide an amount to young people leaving care with a maximum ceiling of £1000.

When you turn 18, your PA can help you use the money, which is intended to help you start out in adult life.

We can hold this money up to your 25th birthday to help you use it on a planned basis with your PA and with the agreement of the Team Manager. Previous uses of 'savings' have included, driving lessons and/help towards buying a car, gap year travel, equipment for a course, career, hobby or leisure interest, discretionary items when setting up home, musical instrument, etc.

Junior ISA

If you were in care for more than 12 months you should also have a Junior ISA, which was set up with £200 initially by the Government.

When you become 18 years old, these accounts will be Adult ISAs or Adult Trust Funds and you will be able to access this money. We receive a letter from the scheme when you are 18 and then your Social Worker or Personal Adviser will be able to give you information about the money in your account and advice on how to access the money.

It is important that you think about what you want to spend it on (or save!), as once the money has been spent, it may be a long time before you are able to add to it again.

Maintenance 16-18

If you are a relevant young person aged 16-18 and are living semi-independently we will be giving you maintenance at the Universal Credit rate to you and Housing Allowance level for rent to your provider.

We will be encouraging you to stay or go back into education or find training or work. If you are working, your wage will be taken into account but we will always make sure you are better off and rewarded for working.

If you cannot evidence what you have been doing to find work, or you refuse opportunities, you will be asked to see your worker or skills worker before you receive your money. When we are concerned about how you are using your money, your support may then be in the form of food vouchers.

When you are about to turn 18, your worker will help you apply for benefits if you are eligible. Benefits will depend on your circumstances such as the level of your earnings or if you are in education.

Your worker will help you seek what you are entitled to from the Department of Work and Pensions. Whilst waiting for benefits to come through, you will need to evidence to your worker that you have done

everything necessary to progress your claim in order for us to keep financially supporting you e.g. by signing on. You can sign a letter allowing us to talk to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) on your behalf.

If you are a parent you will be able to access benefits rather than receive finance from us.

Maintenance 18 - 21

Your Personal Adviser will help you to register for Universal Credit and Housing Element.

If you are over 18 and benefits have been stopped (sanctioned) by the DWP you will need to see your worker or the skills and engagement worker to agree a plan for us to help you.

You may be offered work experience through the skills and engagement worker which you will be expected to attend in order to continue to get our help.

When you are 18 you will have the responsibility of paying your rent whether you are 'staying put' with your carer, in supported lodgings, or in your own place.

Extra Financial Support for 16 to 21 year olds

You will be given an annual clothing allowance from your birthday ie:

- ✓ £300 at age 16 & 17
- ✓ £200 at 18
- ✓ £150 at 19
- ✓ £100 at 20

You will also receive £50 birthday money up to your 21st birthday. You will also receive £50 'Festival' Gift once a year.

Young people serving custodial sentences aged 16-21, may be sent up to £10 per week towards the costs of phone calls/ toiletries.

Accommodation and Utility Bills

To help you learn to budget and manage your finances in your first year living independently, we will pay up to £150 towards your Council Tax if you are not eligible for BANES Council Tax Scheme.

We will also pay £150 towards the cost of your first year of utility bills i.e. water, gas, electric.

Help will be paid in instalments on your key/token/bill and not all at once and is just for your first year of tenancy.

Rents and deposits can be paid for Care Leavers when it is agreed you need to secure suitable accommodation.

Contact & Identity & Health

Extra help is available to support you such as:

- ✓ The cost of obtaining a passport (new or renewal) and provisional driving licence (new – first time). If the driving licence is lost or the young person disqualified from driving, we will not pay for its replacement.
- ✓ Help with glasses and dental treatment – these are normally free for young people, but where there are necessary additional costs, help may be provided.
- ✓ Maintaining contact with families – additional help may be provided towards the cost of maintaining contact with families if these costs are exceptional and on the basis of assessed need and evidenced in Pathway Plans and Reviews

UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM SEEKERS YOUNG PEOPLE

If you are a young refugee, a young asylum seeker, or young person without British citizenship who are care leavers, we will offer you the same service as to any other care leaver. We recognise your particular situation and support you will need to access special immigration advice over any asylum claim. Your Pathway Plan will recognise the different pathways that you may need to take.

Useful information and contacts

To be identified as a care leaver you need to have been in care for a period of at least **13 weeks** (or periods which add up to 13 weeks) which began after age 14 and includes some time on or after your 16th birthday. You are:

- ✓ an 'eligible' child if you are 16 or 17 and still in Care
- ✓ a 'relevant' child if you are 16 or 17 and have left care
- ✓ a 'former relevant' child if you are 18 or over
- ✓ a former 'relevant' child 21+ pursuing Education or Training
- ✓ as a care leaver over 21 you can ask for support from your Personal Adviser up to 25 to help access education and training whether in education or not
- ✓ qualifying young people are young people 16+ and under 25 who leave care after 16 and have gone to live with family or who have been privately fostered or who were in care before being made subject of a special guardianship order: you may be able to receive discretionary financial support on the basis of assessed needs, in which case a pathway plan should be drawn up and reviewed as long as support is provided. The Local Authority must consider whether young person needs help of a kind they can give such as:
 - ✓ Advise and befriend, give assistance
 - ✓ Help with education and training costs
 - ✓ Vacation costs
 - ✓ If you have been in care before 16 but not after becoming 16, you have no leaving care status

If you are not sure you qualify as a care leaver, please ask your Personal Adviser or Social Worker in the Children in Care and Moving on Team 01225 396930.