

**BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL
CARE LEAVERS: OUR LOCAL OFFER
2020**

“Building a better future for all our children and young people so that whatever their starting point, they realise their potential.”

1. OUR PROMISE

1.1 Introduction

We care about what happens to you.

A number of other young people and professionals have helped to produce the following information which is called 'Buckinghamshire Care Leavers' Offer'.

We will continue listening to your views and make sure we are offering what you need. Your social worker or personal adviser (PA) can help you if you don't understand something here.

We know that it is a big step to move out of care and become more independent. We want to make sure that you feel safe and supported and that you know where to find advice you may need.

We promise to:

- Be there for you and support you through the leaving care process in a way which suits you and your needs.
- Let you know about things that might help you to stay connected and make friends.
- Help you with your health and health care needs where we can.
- Explore all your accommodation options with you and to help you find accommodation that suits you and your life.
- Explain your finances to you, talk about all your options and help you make the right decisions.
- Help you fulfil your potential and will support you in your transition to adult life enabling you to be successful in your education, training or employment.

This 'Care Leavers' Local Offer 2020' was developed in consultation with children and young people who are in or just leaving care in Buckinghamshire as well as foster carers and specialist care leaving staff.

2. THE 'LEAVING CARE OFFER'

2.1 What does it mean?

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 ensures that all local authorities establish a Corporate Parenting Board, and publish a 'local offer for care leavers', setting out the services on offer from both the local authority and other agencies.

The local authority must publish information about:

- services which the local authority offers for care leavers as a result of its functions under the Children Act 1989.
- other services which the local authority offers that may assist care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living.
- information about services offered by others which the local authority has power to offer as a result of its functions under the Children Act 1989 / 2004.

As your corporate parent, it is our responsibility to make sure you know what services are available to you, and what you can expect to receive when you are a care leaver.

2.2 Does it apply to me?

The 'offer' in this document applies to you if you were 'looked after' (on a Care Order or in voluntary accommodation) for:

- At least 13 weeks in total starting after your 14th birthday and
- Any time after you reached 16 years of age

Remember that you are entitled to receive various types of advice and support from the Council up to the age of 25.

It will be updated every 2 years with the help of our Children in Care Council (called 'We Do Care') as well as a range of staff and carers.

3. YOUR ENTITLEMENTS

3.1 Pathway Plan

Buckinghamshire Council will work with you as you approach your 16th birthday to agree your 'Pathway Plan' (this is basically a continuation of your Care Plan).

The Pathway Plan must describe how your needs in the following areas are to be met:

- Further education or training.
- Development of skills for adult life and career planning.
- Health needs including well-being and mental health.
- Suitable accommodation.
- Financial management and supporting you to be financially independent.

If you are a care leaver aged 18-21, the Council must keep in touch with you to provide the required support. For those aged 21-25, the Council has a duty to assess and do their best to meet your needs if you have asked for support

The Leaving Care Team will consider with you what extra support you may need. You might, for example, need extra support because:

- You have special educational needs or a disability.
- You are an unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child (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

3.2 Personal Adviser (PA) and Support

Following your 16th birthday, you will be allocated a PA from the Leaving Care Team who will work alongside, and then take over from your allocated social worker. The job of a PA is to get to know you, keep in touch, help review your existing Pathway Plan and work with you to ensure your hopes and aspirations for the future are met. Your PA can help you prepare to live independently and to offer advice and support after you leave care.

Your PA can also help you get any extra or special support, if, e.g. you:

- Have special educational needs or a disability or have an Education and Health Care Plan, known as an EHCP.
- Are in or being released from Custody or have other types of involvement with the Police or Courts.
- Have become a young parent.
- Are experiencing a difficult time perhaps because of the issues for you in your early life, death of a loved one, being lonely, at risk of homelessness or loss of a job/college place.
- Were an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC), and your immigration status remains unclear.

3.2 Independent Reviewing Officer Service

We will involve you in all decisions about how and when you leave the care system. You will have a 'leaving care review' at least 3 months before your 18th birthday chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) and this is one of the many opportunities for your views to be heard. You will be sent a written confirmation of the decisions made at that review within 2 weeks.

If you think it might be helpful, you can contact your IRO after you leave Care.

You can also ask for an advocate who is completely independent of the local authority and who can inform you of your rights. If you want, they can speak for you at meetings or in communication with Children's Social Care.

The Advocacy Service is currently provided by the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS). You can contact NYAS on 01296 432540.

3.3 Leaving care before 18

Our experience is that nearly all young people will be better off staying in care until 18. If you do decide you would like to leave a placement aged 16 or 17, we will ensure that where you want to live is suitable and this will be reviewed regularly in your Pathway Plan.

If you chose to leave care at the age of 16 or 18, the service must be in support of this decision and agreement must be given by the Director of Children's Services.

4. OTHER SUPPORT FOR CARE LEAVERS

4.1 Being Healthy

We will support you with keeping healthy and refer you to specialist services if needed. We will offer:

- A 'health passport' (your health history including your last health assessment).
- Advice about where you can get help to pay for prescription costs.
- Support to register at a local GP and a Dentist.
- If you are pregnant or had a baby in the last 12 months) you can get help with dental charges.
- If needed, support to move from Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS to Adult Mental Health Services) or advice about local counselling services – see appendix.
- Payment for transport costs if attending a hospital or other medical appointments.
- Help to access local authority leisure centres.
- Contribution to essential dental work and/or toward prescription glasses / contact lenses if agreed in your Pathway Plan.

If you are struggling with emotional issues, your PA is there to support you. They can also help you to access other services e.g. 'Time to Talk' and 'Youth Enquiry Services'- see appendix.

Some people use alcohol or drugs as a way of dealing with difficult feelings and emotions which may come from stressful, upsetting or abusive experiences or might be linked to a mental health problem. Alcohol and drugs can make bad emotions feel even worse and this can have a negative impact on your mental health. It is important to know what effect different types of drugs have on your body and speak to your GP about how it could affect any mental health medications you are taking. If you'd rather not talk face-to-face, you can (if you are under 19) contact 'Young Minds'. This is a national charity providing free crisis support, or the 'The Mix' (if you're under 25), by phone, online chat or email.

You can also find lots of reliable information online about drug use and places to find support. The FRANK website (address at the end of this offer) is a really good place to start.

An 'Integrated Lifestyle Service' is available to offer support across smoking, weight management, physical activity and a wide range of lifestyle practice – see www.livewellstaywellbucks.co.uk

Barnardo's offer a service (RU Safe?) for young people (10-18 but up to 21 for those who have a learning difficulty) who are at risk of experiencing sexual and/or criminal exploitation - see <https://www.bucksfamilyinfo.org/kb5/buckinghamshire/fsd/service.page?id=s6vGxOb-8uc>

4.2 Understanding who you are

This is about what makes you... you. If you wish, we will help you with any questions and provide you with access to services to help you understand your identity, this includes:

- Your early life experiences.
- Who your family are.
- Your care experiences.
- Your gender.
- Any disabilities you may have.
- Your sexuality.
- Your race, culture, religion and ethnicity.
- Your abilities and help developing your ambitions.
- Helping you to maintain and/or explore your faith and ethnicity.

4.3 Education, Employment and Training (EET) Training Opportunities

Whilst you are between 18-25 years old, the Virtual School can continue to support you. The 'post 16' officer will help you to get involved with education, training or work. In preparation for leaving care, the virtual school run a variety of programmes including:

- Summer Programme with St Mary's University to help you get ready for work and/or education by developing confidence, skills and self-esteem.
- A University taster day with Oxford Brookes University to help you experience what it might be like as a university student.
- Work with Trinity College to help achieve nationally recognised art qualifications - artwork is showcased in local exhibitions.

In addition, the Community Youth Service also provide Traineeships.

When leaving our care, we want you to be successful and chase your dreams. We can:

- Offer career information and advice e.g. helping you write or update your 'CV' (a short document summarising your interests, skills and achievements) and prepare for interviews with employers and colleges.
- Organise short-term work experience with external employers as well as within the Council.
- If you choose to look for work within Buckinghamshire Council, guarantee you an interview if you meet its minimum requirements.
- Support you to apply for internships or apprenticeships.

If you have not been successful in finding work or a training programme, a multi-agency Panel meets regularly to look at the obstacles you are facing and consider any additional support that could be put in place to help you access work and training opportunities..

We can help you with many of the costs associated with looking for work, including:

- A set of interview clothes up to a maximum of £75.
- Travel costs to get to interviews.
- A haircut before an interview.
- Any equipment / uniform you might need for work or college.

4.4 University

If you are thinking of going to University, the Virtual School can provide specialist advice and we will.

- Help you choose the right course and university to match your talents and interests.
- Help you obtain tuition fees, maintenance loans and any other funds available for your chosen university.
- Provide a Council Education 'bursary' of £2000.
- If necessary, enable you to access your 'setting up home' allowance for kitchenware / bed linen of up to £2000 and associated 'moving costs'
- Pay the cost of travel to and from university at start and end of terms and (as agreed with your PA) a visit per term to a family member.
- If needed, provide a term-time bus pass.
- Help with the cost of accessing university leisure facilities, essential reading / equipment and cost of accommodation during the holiday periods (as agreed with your PA).
- Meet costs associated with a vocational placement (travel / placement abroad etc).
- Meet cost of a graduation gown, photos (as agreed in your Pathway Plan).
- There is a Panel chaired by a Head of Service ensuring your accommodation and support needs are met. Talk to your PA about this.

4.5 Accommodation

Between 16-18, your PA will talk with you about the different types of accommodation that are affordable and may best meet your needs.

The intention is that if you can demonstrate that you can live independently and manage a tenancy, suitable housing will be identified, usually within Buckinghamshire.

4.6 Staying Put

Under what is called a 'Staying Put' arrangement, we will support you to stay with your foster carer/s until you are 21, if that is best for you and agreed with your carer/s. If you are staying with your carer/s, you are expected to pay toward the cost of your room, but this is a lot less than rental prices. Your PA will advise on this and the current policy.

4.7 'Staying Close, Keeping in Touch'

This scheme is for young people leaving residential care provided directly by Buckinghamshire Council. You will be able to choose a member of the Care-team to support you after you have left the Unit. You will have the benefit of an 'out of hours' support service provided by the staff with whom you have worked.

4.8 Supported Accommodation

When you live in supported accommodation, you will be helped to develop independence skills. You will have your own lockable room though may have to share other facilities such as kitchen and bathroom.

The level of support will depend upon your individual needs. Your PA will visit the accommodation with you before you decide about moving in. 2 options exist:

- '16+ Supported Group Living' in a shared house with up to 5 bedrooms to develop independence skills.

- ‘Solo Placement’ for young people with some capacity to live independently though needing additional support about education or employment.

4.9 ‘Shared Lives’

If you have additional needs and require a lot of support to live independently after the age of 18, your social worker will help you decide whether you are suitable for this scheme. You would live in a carer’s home and receive support relevant to your needs.

4.10 Independent Living

When you are ready to live independently, you will be supported to move into your own accommodation. This could be a private tenancy, Housing Association or local authority housing.

We will help with the expenses of moving into independence e.g. moving costs – see the Financial Support section for details.

4.11 Private Sector Accommodation

If private sector accommodation is thought to be the best option for you, we can support you to secure a long-term lease with landlords.

4.12 Care Planning and Resources Panel

We have a weekly Children’s Care Planning and Resources Panel at which social workers and PAs provide details of the level of support you need as highlighted in your pathway plan. This then helps us to find the right accommodation for you which best meet your own individual needs.

4.13 Nomination / ‘bidding’ process

When you are 16, you will be supported to complete an ‘on-line’ ‘Buckinghamshire home choice’ application. This scheme aims to offer more choice about where you can live when you are ready to live independently.

Being ready for your own place isn’t just about being able to cook and clean (although this is part of it). Showing that you are ready for independence also means being able to keep yourself safe, making sure that you understand what bills you will need to pay and showing that you have been able to manage your money well.

You will need to work with your PA, your carers and support staff to prepare you for having your own accommodation. When you are able to demonstrate that you are confident and able to live independently your PA can nominate you to go onto the housing list.

If you discharge yourself from the care of the local authority before you are 18, you may no longer be able to apply.

4.14 Finances

As an 18+ adult, you are expected to support yourself financially by means of paid work. If you are in education, you are expected to claim any grants and loans you are entitled to and we will provide some additional funding if you are university to support you with this.

At times, there will be additional financial support available and we will try to help you in ways that most parents do. Any additional payments will be laid out in your 'Pathway Plan' and these will be based upon your needs and your efforts/ achievements. We are always happy to offer advice about how to manage your money effectively as we know that living on a limited income is difficult. If there are periods in which you are unable to work, we can offer support and advice on applying for Universal Credit. We can also offer support with increasing your prospects of employment by undertaking voluntary work, work experience and apprenticeships.

4.15 Turning 18

By the time you are 18 you should already have a bank account into which wages and other income (savings or Benefits) can be paid. You will need identification documents (ID) e.g. passport or driving licence. If you don't have a bank account, or if you have any difficulty with your ID documents, your PA will help you with this.

In order to ensure a smooth transition from care to claiming benefits, the Council will provide up to 3 weeks; grant equivalent to 'Income Support' rates.

4.16 Savings

When you entered care, your social worker, PA or carer will have set up a savings account with and for you. You will be able to access these savings when you are 18. The purpose of this scheme is to invest in opportunities to help your future life chances. You should discuss with your PA how you plan to spend this money.

4.17 Setting up Home Grant

When you leave care and move into your own accommodation, you will receive a 'leaving care grant' of £2000. Your PA will help you identify what you need and where to buy essential items. If you move, you will need to bring all bought items with you as this grant is a 'one-off'.

4.18 Council Tax and Utility Bills

Managing to pay bills can be very challenging for those on a small budget. Some accommodation charges include utility (water, gas and electric) bills but most do not, and it is necessary to set aside enough money to pay those bills. In order to make things easier for you, when you have your own tenancy, we will pay your Council Tax bill for up to 3 years from when the tenancy begins.

4.19 Birthday and Festivity Presents

We want to help you celebrate special occasions. We will therefore give every care leaver who is aged between 18 and 21 and living independently, £50 on their 18th and 21st and £25 on their 19th and 20th birthday. In addition, a further £50 at a festive event of their choice once per year. This can be at Christmas, Diwali or Eid for example (but not £50 for all celebrations for those of mixed faith).

4.20 Additional Financial Support

Other costs that may be covered if they have been agreed within your 'Pathway Plan' to help you to achieve education or employment goals, these may be:

- Travel costs to and from college.
- Leisure Centre / gym membership, membership at a sporting club or recognised schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh Scheme.
- Interview outfit and travel to and from job / college interviews.
- Education bursaries (see Education, Employment & Training Section for more detail)
- Buying essential food items when first moving into independent accommodation (maximum £30)
- Paying a rent deposit.

4.21 Care Leavers who are Parents

As with all new parents, you are entitled to the full range of health services (GP, Midwives and Health Visitors).

'Healthy Start' vouchers are available to pregnant women and lone parents of children aged less than 4.

Alongside this, the Council can provide additional support through the 'Family-Nurse Partnership'. This is a home visiting programme for first-time mothers and families, offering 'well-being' and parenting support for the first 2 years of your child's life.

When your child reaches 2 years of age, we will help you access 15 free hours of childcare and this rises to 30 hours, if you are working, when your child is 3.

You will also be able to get support from Children's Centres so as to offer you and your child the best start in life - HC2 forms www.nhs.uk/healthcosts/

4.22 Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) who turn 18 and have not received an initial decision on their asylum application can access support from the Council in the same way as any other Care leaver through their Pathway Plan.

Young people who become appeals rights exhausted (ARE) and are 'Human Rights Assessed' as having a barrier to return to the country of origin will receive support. This support can be granted until whichever of the following occurs first:

- An 'Assisted / Voluntary Return' Package is arranged.
- The barrier to return is removed.
- The individual reaches 21 years of age or s/he is returned to the country of origin.

4.23 Disability

Between the ages of 16 and 18, we will start the transition process from Children's to Adults' Services. You can ask to see your 'Transitional Assessment' which will identify the help you will need for a successful future. You may also want to ask for an advocate to help you – see appendix for contact details.

4.24 Developing relationships, making friends and living in the community

Making good relationships is really important. It helps you to feel secure, feel well, have fun and to be an active member of your community, we are always happy to talk to you about this and we can help by:

- Providing information on groups and clubs you could join.
- Informing you about awards, schemes, and competitions to enter, making best use of your talents and interests.
- Helping you enrol on the 'Electoral Register', so you can vote and get your voice heard.
- Informing you about voluntary work that might interest you.
- Providing you with a mentor / peer mentor to support you in making choices.
- Helping you to maintain or regain contact with those people who are important to you e.g. supporting you with making contact with people you may have lost touch with and organising family group conferences (FGC) so that we can look at how your family can support you.
- Providing you with opportunities through the 'We Do Care' network to develop friendships with other care leavers and have your say in improving our Care Leaving Services - see appendix

4.25 Support for young people in custody up until age of 18

If you have to spend time for any reason in a custodial facility, in addition to your social worker and personal adviser, you will be allocated:

- A worker from Youth Offending Service.
- A worker from the Offender Manager Unit from within the custodial facility you are in.

They will work together to keep you safe from harm and ensure you have access to services you may need such as education, money, visits, etc

They will arrange regular meetings with you and help you to develop a constructive plan of activity whilst you are in custody to ensure your time is used effectively.

We will ensure that any custody planning and preparation is carried out in advance of a discharge date, and that support is in place following release.

5. COMPLAINTS / USING AN ADVOCATE

As a young adult, you will have your own opinions and views. Sometimes, although hopefully not often, these might differ to ours. Although we may not always agree, we will listen to you and we will try to resolve any differences. We will also help you, if you feel you have been treated unfairly, and support you to challenge what has happened or to make a formal complaint.

You have a right to see the information we keep about you, including the files and records written about you during your involvement with social care services. We will try to share this information with you at an appropriate time and help you to make sense of your individual

experiences. We will make sure that a discussion takes place fully explaining this process before you access your records.

We recognise that sometimes you may want someone else to support you with this.

The Advocacy Service is there to support you to speak-up and take part in decisions that affect your life. The Service can explain your rights and entitlements and help you understand things clearly.

The Advocacy Service is independent of social workers or PAs and will keep conversations confidential if it does not put yourself or others in harm. It may help if you:

- Are confused by why certain decisions have been made about you
- Would like an advocate to come with you to important meetings such as a Reviews or Pathway Planning meeting
- Need help to write a wishes and feelings statement to help you say what you want to say and make sure people listen to you
- Need information advice about your rights
- Are unhappy about the way you are being treated by Children's Services and you are worried about plans being made
- Need support in making a formal complaint

If you would like to let us know what you like about the service and what you would like us to do more of, we would also love to hear your views. We value your input and need you to help shape our service to make it the best it can be, so your feedback is always welcome. This is our offer to you and we hope that it makes the services and support very clear so that you have a good idea of what is available to you. Please speak to your Personal Advisor about any support you are interested in.

APPENDIX

BlueIce App developed with young people, to help manage your emotions and reduce the urges to self-harm.

ChildLine is a confidential service for children and young people up to nineteen years old; you can contact a ChildLine counsellor about anything – no problem is too big or too small – call free on [0800 1111](tel:08001111), chat online, or send an email.

Epic Friends was developed by the NHS in Sheffield to help young people know how to help friends who might be struggling to cope emotionally <http://epicfriends.co.uk/>

FRANK offers friendly, confidential advice about drugs; it can help you find out everything you might want to know about drugs (and some stuff you don't) www.talktofrank.com

HeadMeds was created by YoungMinds to offer accessible and useful information about mental health medication; it has lots of videos of young people talking about their experiences of medication <https://youngminds.org.uk/youngminds-professionals/our-projects/headmeds/>

'Healthy Minds' is a local self-referral service delivered by Oxfordshire Health <https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/healthyminds/>

LGBT Bucks aims to inform Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people about services in and around Buckinghamshire. It includes national and local information, as well as practical tips and advice. <http://lgbtbucks.org/>

My CAMHS Choices provides young people accessing CAMHS with the information you need to make meaningful choices about your care, including a really useful links and resources <http://www.opentalk.info/resource/my-camhs-choices/>

National Youth Advocacy Service <https://www.buckscc.gov.uk/services/care-for-children-and-families/looked-after-children/childrens-advocacy-and-independent-visitors/>

OCD Youth aims to increase awareness and access to support for anyone under 25 affected by Obsessive Compulsive Disorder; it is run by and is for young people with OCD www.ocdyouth.org

Buckinghamshire Family Information Service provides information about services for children and families <https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/>

OXME health pages offer advice on staying healthy, solving health problems, alcohol, mental health and relationships, including information for young people in care, young carers and others <https://oxme.info/cms/health>

Samaritans provides a helpline and email for anyone who has something that's troubling them; you can call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year telephone: [116123](tel:116123)

The Campaign Against Living Miserably, or CALM, is a charity aiming to prevent male suicide in the UK; it has a helpline and webchat facility - <https://www.thecalmzone.net/>
Time to Talk www.youthaccess.org.uk

The Prison Advice and Care Trust is a national charity that provides support to those in custody their families.
https://www.prisonadvice.org.uk/?gclid=EAlaIQobChMIItubd5a7_6gIVV-vtCh0htwGjEAAYASAAEgJJnvD_BwE

Young Minds offer comprehensive and accessible information about mental health and emotional wellbeing, including resources for you to download www.youngminds.org.uk

Youth Health Talk offers information about a range of illnesses and other health-related issues from the perspective of people's real life experiences <https://www.mefirst.org.uk/resource/youth-health-talk/>