



**CORPORATE PARENTING
FINANCIAL PROVISION
(for young people aged 16-
25)
2023**

LONDON BOROUGH OF MERTON

FINANCIAL PROVISION FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS 2023

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Introduction

This document has been produced in accordance with the provisions of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and the Social Work Act 2017 which aims to ensure that:

1. corporate parenting plays a prominent role throughout the process of leaving care and that the local authority behaves in the manner of a good parent in assisting young people in care transition to adulthood
2. To ensure that young people receive comprehensive support in all aspects of their lives once they have left care to the age of 21 years, and beyond to 25 years if they request the need for ongoing support or until an agreed programme of education is concluded.

In particular, the financial provisions will cover:

1. Accommodation
2. Help with education and training to the end of an agreed programme (“student support”)
3. Benefits and allowances
4. General assistance for those who have left care up to the age of 25 years.

Eligibility for Financial Provision

The financial provision outlined below will apply to those **Eligible, Relevant** and **Former Relevant** young people entitled to a service under the provisions of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and the Children and Young Persons Act 2008, with extended provisions under the Social Work Act 2017.

The support outlined here will also be available to any **Qualifying** young person if the need for such support is identified during a needs assessment, and there are no alternative sources of support available to that young person

Terminology

Eligible - young person is in care and was in care on or after their 16th birthday and have been in care for at least 13 weeks since they were 14 years old.

Relevant – was Eligible but has left care while aged 16 – 17 years. This status ceases if the young person returns to family for 6 months or more prior to their 18th birthday.

Former Relevant – either was Eligible or Relevant and has turned 18 years (“care leaver”)

Qualifying - have been looked after following their 16th birthday, but for less than the 13 weeks since their 14th birthday or were accommodated in a non-local authority setting or privately fostered over the age of 16 years.

Preparation

1. Preparation for leaving care should start before a young person ceases to be in care. Regardless of the child's age and whether or not they may be looked after until independence, there should be plans for their leaving care, even if the plan is to return the child home.
2. The steps to prepare a young person should be clearly outlined in the Care Plan prior to a young person's 16th birthday and in the Pathway Plan from at least 3 months after their 16th birthday.
3. A child in care should have the support to learn independence, such as:
 - a. **cooking**
 - b. **budgeting**
 - c. **banking**
 - d. **shopping**
4. These skills are important to introduce even at primary school age with fun activities and games, then later as an older child through chores and independent activities.
5. In addition to activities in the foster home or accommodation, the team will deliver Independence workshops and support the young person to complete the 'Passport to my Home' booklet, identifying successful steps toward independence.
6. Young people aged 17 years and older should start to pay a 'contribution' fee to reflect the amount that Housing providers require toward utilities (usually £6-8 per week) and that young people need to be prepared to pay after 18 years. The amount will be saved for them to receive when leaving care and can contribute additional funds for their birthday gift, travel cost for a holiday or additional clothing not already covered.

1 Accommodation and Living costs

1.1 Relevant young people who have left care aged 16 – 17 years

- i. The young person will remain allocated to the team as a Relevant child and will require a Pathway Plan.
- ii. If a 'relevant child' has returned home to their parents, they cease to be a relevant child after being at home for 6 months. However, if this arrangement later breaks down *before their 18th birthday*, they return to being a 'relevant child'.
- iii. Unless you and your manager are satisfied that a young person's welfare does not require it, suitable accommodation should be provided.
- iv. "Suitable accommodation" – must be reasonably practicable for the young person given their needs, which should be clearly outlined in the pathway plan. For those aged 16-17 who have left care, it would not usually be appropriate for them to manage their own tenancy. However, a range of options should be considered with the young person based on their needs and level of independence.

1.2 Eligible (and returning Relevant) young people in care aged 16 – 17 years

- i. We provide a subsistence payment to cover daily living costs if the young person is living in semi-independent accommodation and unable to claim benefits. If the young person finds it difficult to budget, we can give them a food vouchers as part of the payment to make sure they always have enough for food.

1.3 Housing Support for those 18 years and older (up to 25 years)

The local authority has a duty to assist a former relevant child, to the extent that their welfare or education/training requires it, by contributing to the expenses of living near the place where they are working, looking for work, or receiving education or training. Services that may assist care leavers, includes services relating to accommodation

All young people who are eligible to receive benefits must be supported to apply for these 6 weeks prior to turning 18 years.

i. Staying Put

- Foster carers providing accommodation and support to young people who have left care will receive allowances in line with those outlined in the Staying Put Policy document. The young person will be expected to contribute to rent, utilities and food.
- This arrangement is available until the young person is 21 years old.

ii. Supported Lodgings

- For young people unable to remain 'staying put' with foster carers and not yet independent enough for their own tenancy should be offered a 'Supported Lodgings' provision.

iii. Shared Lives accommodation

- Young people who would be vulnerable in a private or social housing tenancy due to mental or physical health, emotional or behavioural difficulties can be referred for a Shared Lives accommodation setting.
- The carers are trained to support older teenagers and young adults with learning needs and disruptive behaviours that would present significant difficulties in other environments.
- The carers will support young people with independence skills.

iv. Semi-independent accommodation

- For young people over 18 years unable to remain 'staying put' with foster carers and independent enough for a tenancy, who require temporary accommodation until a successful nomination can be supported in semi-independent accommodation if all other options have been discounted. This would be with 5 hours key work support.
- Additional key-work hours should only be in place for young people presenting with vulnerabilities and safety needs. Shared lives accommodation must also be considered for vulnerable young people. 15 hours key work support would not be suitable beyond the age of 20 years and should be reviewed in line with Shared Lives options if the young person presents with mental health, emotional or learning needs.
- 24-hour staffed units are only suitable for 16-17 year olds who require 24 hour supervision. 24-hour staffed units are not usually suitable for anyone beyond the age of 18 years but can be considered if there are significant safety and welfare needs. In these instances agreement for 24 hour units beyond the age of 18 can be considered at the weekly High Cost Panel with the decision made by the Corporate Parenting Head of Service. If agreement is given this will return to the High Cost Panel to be reviewed within 6 months time.
- If a young person aged under 18 years is unable to remain in foster care then they can only be placed in semi independent accommodation with 24 hour staffed support. This can only be agreed by the Head of Corporate Parenting.

v. Rent Deposit scheme

- The first month's rent and the first deposit for private sector accommodation will be paid where it is considered that this will be appropriate accommodation for young people and where the rent would be affordable for a young person. A Pre Tenancy Determination should be requested to ensure the rent will be covered by Housing Benefit in the event of the young person claiming benefits.
- Rents will need to fall within the Shared Room Rate regulations – the exemption of care leavers from the Shared Room Rate must be quoted in the event of Housing Benefit

claims but young people need to be made aware that the exception ends when they turn 22 years old.

vi. Housing tenancy

- Young people need to be made fully aware of the limited availability of Social Housing. The bidding process is time consuming and often disheartening due to the number of people competitively bidding for the same provision
- Care experienced adults are considered to be a “priority need” until 21 years
- Merton’s Housing Department can make a direct offer to young people who have been nominated by the 16+ Team but this is a one-time only offer and the reasons for turning an offer down cannot be unreasonable, otherwise the young person will risk losing their bidding status and be deemed intentionally homeless
- Merton’s Housing Department has pledged 15 nominations for care experienced adults seeking Social Housing. If a PA or Social Worker considers the young person suitable for a direct offer, this should be submitted for consideration at the fortnightly Joint Housing Panel

1.4 Setting Up Home Allowance (SUHA)

- The Setting Up Home Allowance of up to £3000 (as of 1st April, 2023) is available to care experienced adults who have achieved a permanent housing arrangement (social housing or private rental tenancy) until the age of 25 years.
- The allowance will be provided according to need at any given time up to the maximum amount (see Appendix 1). The allowance will not be provided where young people do not need the items listed in the appendix.
- Cash balances of unspent Setting Up Home Allowances will not be available to young people where equipment is not needed.
- Young people will, in the first instance and where relevant, be assisted to apply for LWSS (Local Welfare Support Scheme)
- Where this is payable, the setting up home allowance will ‘top up’ the LWSS to the specified amount.
- Additional items (i.e. any not listed at Appendix 1) should not be purchased without the agreement of the relevant line manager.
- Circumstances may arise where it will be reasonable to pay Setting Up Home Allowances after services end (for example the young person is still in an education programme or has secured their tenancy within their 25th birthday year). Any agreements will be made by the relevant line manager and recorded on the young person’s file.
- Replacement items in the event of breakage or wear and tear will not be available.

- For those in Semi-Independent Accommodation that is not fully furnished and to support the young person's independence, up to £250 of the Setting up Home Allowance (SUHA) can be accessed with the agreement of the line manager.
- All items purchased need to remain with the young person and must be on the SUHA list in Appendix 1 to avoid any gaps in items when they move into their permanent tenancy.
- A 'settling in' package of essential stock foods and items (e.g. salt and pepper, spices, washing liquid, toilet paper) can also be purchased for all young people going into semi-independent or their first tenancy if moving from foster care

1.5 Vacant provision for those in further education

- i. If a former relevant child is in full-time higher education or residential further education in accordance with their pathway plan, and their term-time accommodation is not available, we have a duty to provide accommodation during vacations, or to pay the young person enough to secure accommodation for themselves. This could enable a young person to continue in education and not become homeless during the holidays. The duty continues for as long as they continue to pursue the course of education.
- ii. The provision outlined above is not available to young people in foster placements or community homes where there are allocated budgets to cover costs.

2 General assistance (phone, suitcase, citizenship, time with family)

Where young people do not own a mobile phone, one low cost **phone** (eg.£20) will be provided.

Young people will be provided with one **suitcase**. Additional storage for moving accommodation may be provided by way of boxes and / or laundry bags.

The costs of documents associated with '**citizenship**' will be provided:

- birth certificates
- driving licences
- Passports and British Citizenship costs – for young people and their children will be covered.
- The cost of either a passport stamp or a travel document will be covered for young people with Discretionary Leave.

Any young person with a **leisure** / sport interest or **wellbeing activity** identified in their pathway plan can be supported with up to £10 per week (**or up to** a total of £500 per year) to join a gym or leisure centre, or contribute toward driving lessons, or contribute toward a holiday. This is not reliant on being in full-time education and needs to be planned with the young person based on their leisure / wellbeing interests up to the maximum amount (either weekly or as a larger amount – but not both).

Additional travel costs to **visit family** and ex carers can be considered as per the Pathway Plan and agreed with the relevant line manager

2.1 Birthday allowance

A birthday allowance will be payable to all children in care and care leavers who are living in supported accommodation or independently. The amounts available are as follows:

16 th	£25
17 th	£25
18 th	£50
19 th	£25
20 th	£25
21 st	£50
22 +	£25

3 Education, Training and Employment Support (“Student Support”)

3.1 Further Education Full time (12+ hours per week)

For those over 18 years in full time Further Education and other recognised education and training courses the following additional support can be provided in addition to universal credit (or in addition to subsistence for those aged 16-17 years in semi-independent accommodation):

WiFi bundle <i>if no internet</i>	up to £5 per week
Travel to college -	Variable
Books/Educational equipment -	Variable (up to £250 per year)
Support with particular needs (e.g. health, hair care etc) -	Variable – up to £15 per week max.

Young people in full time further education will be provided with a **laptop** or PC

Young people under 19 years old can have a free **Oyster Card** if a s20 letter is signed and given to Transport for London. Those over 19 years will get a subsidy but will have to pay for the Oyster Card, unless in exceptional circumstances.

Education attendance will be monitored by the allocated worker. If the hours reduce to below 12 hours per week then the below arrangement will be in place.

3.2 Further Education less than 12 hours per week

For those over 18 years old or 16-17 years in semi-independent accommodation, as an **incentive bonus**, of £3 per hour of teaching time will be considered for students undertaking part time study. Any payments should not exceed **£21 per week**.

3.3 Help with seeking employment

A local bus pass will be provided to enable the young person to seek employment. This may be withdrawn in circumstances where it is evident that s/he is not doing so.

Assistance will be given to provide for clothing required for interviews and for necessary equipment for work. Amounts for interview clothing are up to the following amounts:

Trousers / skirt	£25
Shirt	£15
Tie	£10
Shoes	£35
Suit (according to need)	£150

3.4 Higher Education

Student Finance applications should be completed by **30 April** to ensure that finance is available at the start of the first term

On the 'Application for Student Finance' form students should apply for the full amount of the following:

- Maintenance Loan
- Tuition Fee Loan
- Maintenance Grant

Students should also complete other sections of the application identifying themselves as a care leaver.

Students should also apply for the Disabled Students Grant and Child Care grant where appropriate.

It is very important that students look at their chosen University and apply for bursaries or scholarships where they exist. Every University is different and many offer significant practical and financial support to care leavers.

Students in Higher Education will receive a bursary of £500 per term (payable at the beginning of each term). A payment of £750 will be made to each student at the beginning of the summer break, with the exception of the final year. **Total per year £2250**, with the exception of the final year where the summer break payment will not apply.

All prospective HE students should receive a financial assessment for 16+ Income Maximisation Officer.

3.5 Apprenticeship support

Where young people are undertaking an apprenticeship or similar, a level of 'top up' will be payable where the apprenticeship is full time to ensure that young people receive at least the minimum wage – at time of writing £10.42 per hour worked. This is subject to a financial assessment from 16+ team Income Maximisation Officer.

In addition to the above, all young people undertaking apprenticeships will receive a bursary from the Education Funding and Skills Agency which is paid in three instalments over the course of the first year of their apprenticeship. This amount will be £1000 until 31st July, 2023, rising to £3000 from 1st August onwards. This amount is paid to the training provider who will then pay the young person, with the first instalment being paid within 30 days of the apprenticeship commencing.

3.6 Parents in education

Childcare costs are generally not available from London Borough of Merton to support learning unless government funding is available via Care to Learn, Student Finance for HE students, NHS bursaries or via subsidised college crèches.

Cases will be considered on an individual basis following discussion with social worker and manager, particularly for those who are unable to access the above avenues and are in full-time education.

For parents of children who are over 2 years old, they should apply for the 15 hours free childcare scheme. For parents of younger children and where the above avenues have been attempted and exhausted then support can be considered for those in full-time education.

3.7 Expectations

- Where financial assistance is provided, attendance and progress will be carefully monitored through contact with relevant college staff by the case holding worker to ensure the expenditure is justified and the student is making the best use of the opportunities.
- Where a student is failing to fully attend a course, allowances will be withdrawn or reduced.
- Students will be able to undertake part time work and receive college bursaries without any reduction in education allowances outlined above.
- **Further Education (FE) students aged 18 plus will be expected to claim Income Support and Housing Benefit** (where the course had started before their 25th birthday and is 12 hrs per week or more) which will be 'topped up' to the amounts identified above. Students studying more than 21 hrs per week (or 12 + hrs per week if studying up to A level) will be expected to claim Council Tax benefit.

- FE students should apply to their college for discretionary and bursary funds to cover the costs of necessary equipment, activities and registration/student union fees. Charitable applications should also be considered where additional or specific needs are identified.
- Where access to funds are not available, costs for essential equipment and essential college trips will be provided for in addition to the allowances.
- Reduced travel costs will be accessed where available
- For students on a low income but not claiming benefits, an HCI form will be completed for free/reduced health charges.
- During the summer holidays, young people will be expected to find employment or apply for benefits. This must be applied for before their last week of college.
- Allowances will not be available in advance except for planned trips away.

4 Benefits and allowances

4.1 Those not in Education, Training or Employment and eligible to receive benefits

There will be a variety of reasons why individual care leavers are not actively engaged in education, training or employment. Each circumstance will be unique and some discretion will therefore need to be applied, but the following basic principles will apply.

Care leavers aged 18 + and not employed will be expected to apply for Universal Credit (unless other benefits apply). Benefit level support will be provided to young people awaiting their first benefit payment. Where this is the case, young people will be expected to repay backdated benefit payments on receipt and should sign an agreement to do so before receiving the first payment and give their consent for the 16+ Team to track progress of the benefit claims.

<https://www.gov.uk/benefits-calculators>

Young people are to be supported to apply for benefits **6 weeks prior to turning 18 years old.**

Universal Credit, at time of writing is £67.20 per week. It is expected that young people will be able to budget for the following amounts:

Food	£34.20
Clothes	£8.00
Toiletries / cleaning materials	£7.00
Utilities (when aged 18+)	£14.00
Water rates [where applicable]	£4.00

Some items will be paid on a monthly basis and young people need to be prepared in how to save and budget for these as and when they are required to be paid.

Housing costs are to be paid through the Housing Benefit, which young people are to also apply for before their 18th birthday. If the young person is in semi-independent accommodation, they are to sign a new fee agreement and show this to the DWP to support their Housing Benefit payments.

Ensure that the fee agreement does not include support costs or anything above the Local Housing Allowance. These are to be outlined in a separate fee agreement that can be paid by the Access to Resources Team. If a young person moves, then ensure that the new Local Housing Allowance for that area is reflected in the fee agreement.

Unemployed young people who subsequently find work should apply for extended Housing and Council Tax Benefit (applies for a four-week period).

i. Failure to apply for benefits or default on requirements

Where young people fail to apply for relevant benefits, financial support will be provided at £5.00 per day for two weeks, and up to a maximum of £5.00 in kind (food purchases) thereafter.

Young People who default on requirements made by the DWP, lose money or experience difficulties in budgeting and who effectively find themselves destitute will be expected to seek assistance from the DWP or Local Assistance Scheme where relevant. Where this is refused, a discretionary payment to a maximum of £5.00 per day, or food vouchers, will be made to ensure that the young person has access to food until their next payment is due. Assistance will usually be given on a day-to-day basis.

4.2 16-17 years old in semi-independent accommodation or care experienced adults awaiting leave to remain or in part-time education

In circumstances where a care leaver is under 18 years and able to work but chooses not to, an allowance in line with benefit payments will be made where benefit is not payable. An HCI form should be completed for free/reduced health charges. Additional payments will be considered to provide for necessary health needs.

Young people in these circumstances will be paid subsistence the equivalent of Universal Credit. The accommodation or housing costs will be paid also. Please see the Accommodation section above to determine the most appropriate provision and the options available (but not Social Housing or Private Rental).

Young people who begin employment will receive an allowance equivalent to benefit rates until they receive their first salary payment.

4.3 Those in custody or hospital treatment

For those young people in custody or receiving compulsory hospital treatment, a 'pocket money' allowance of up to £10 per week will be agreed with the relevant establishment.

For those aged 18 years or older, a 'phone allowance' of £5 per week can be provided to support contact with their worker, family and legal representative.

4.4 Those who are or expecting to be parents

i. 16 – 17 year olds

Looked after young people aged 16 and 17 who become parents will be eligible for state benefits regardless of their looked after status or placement from the date of the child's birth, with the exception of Housing Benefit.

Benefit level allowances will be payable for the period of time the benefit claim is being processed, from the date of the child's birth.

In addition, an amount equivalent to the maternity grant (for the first child only) will be made available prior to the birth in order for the young person to purchase necessary equipment. Young people receiving money in these circumstances will be expected to repay the amount as they are subsequently able to claim the maternity grant after the child's birth. Young people should sign an agreement to repay before receiving any finance.

i. 18 – 25 year olds

'Former relevant' young people – that is, those that are aged 18 – 25 years and have previously been an 'Eligible' child will be entitled to claim Income Support eleven weeks prior to the due date of child and the maternity grant if not employed.

Young people who are 'Former Relevant' and employed will receive the equivalent of the maternity grant from the 16+ Team.

During pregnancy, young people will receive an additional allowance of up to £150 for maternity clothing.

The cost of a bed for young people's children will be covered where there is no other source of funding available.

APPENDIX 1

SETTING UP HOME ALLOWANCE

The following items are included as necessary items for equipping accommodation and are provided through the Setting Up Home Allowance up to a maximum of £3000. Reasonable removal costs will also be covered, **plus additional costs for carpets and curtains (below).**

Bedroom
Bed/bed settee
Bedding
Wardrobe
Chest Drawers
Lamp
Kitchen
Cooker and Installation
Fridge
Saucepans / frying pan
Cutlery
Plates / dishes / mugs
Iron / Board
Glasses
Wastebin
Kettle
Kitchen Utensils
Toaster
Microwave
Table / Chairs
Lounge
Sofa
Television
Shelving/Units/Coffee Table
Bathroom
Mirror
Bath Mat
Towels
Shower Curtain
Laundry Basket
Toilet Roll Holder/Brush
Clothes Airer

General
Washing machine/plumbing in
Vacuum Cleaner
Decorating materials (when needed)
Carpets and Curtains (in addition to the £3000 amount)
Carpets - up to £8.50 per sq metre + fitting
Curtains – up to £50 per window incl fixtures