Financial arrangements for care leavers

**SCOPE OF THIS CHAPTER**

This chapter details the policies and practice in Herefordshire’s 16+ team with regard to financial support for young people leaving care. A range of additional and relevant organisations are referenced throughout.

**RELEVANT GUIDANCE**

[**Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000**](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/contents)

[**Staying Put, HM Government, May 2013**](http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/17711/1/Staying_Put_Guidance.pdf)

[**Children and Social Work Act 2017**](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/extending-personal-adviser-support-to-age-25)

# Introduction

Herefordshire Council understand that young people who are leaving care will require support during their transition to adulthood and independence. This policy recognises the continuum of preparation and support required by care leavers to allow them to become financially capable and competent early in their adulthood. No two individuals have identical needs therefore a full assessment of the young person’s need, which includes a financial assessment, must be completed for all eligible and relevant children and a decision made as to the financial support required. This will be recorded within the Pathway Plan.

This Financial policy is designed to meet the requirements of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and takes into account the statutory requirements for supporting care leavers identified in the [**Children Act 1989, Care Planning, Placement and Case Review regulations 2010**](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20131027134109/https:/www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationdetail/page1/dcsf-00185-2010).

**Summary of Supporting Procedures**

The policy sets out the following:

* The young people to whom it applies;
* The duties of the Local Authority in respect of accommodation and maintenance costs;
* Details of financial arrangements and payment mechanisms including those remaining in full time education.

This policy does not cover:

* Young people who are looked after on a respite care basis (less than four weeks);
* Relevant young people if they have returned home for a period of six months or more;
* Young people aged 16 to 21 for whom Children’s Well-being directorate has powers and duties, but fall outside of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

# 2. Financial Policy for Children Leaving Care

Herefordshire Council’s financial policy for care leavers seeks to support young people to manage their financial resources gradually helping them to take responsibility for themselves. All planning of financial assistance for care leavers should include assessment of the following before any decision is made:

* Whether the request is consistent with the aim of the Pathway Plan for the young person. Initial Pathway Plans should be very clear about financial arrangements and reviews should update these arrangements as necessary;
* Whether the young person is able to finance the item or request by themselves;
* Whether it is appropriate to approach the birth parents to request financial help;
* Whether there is an available grant from education, training, benefit, charity or trust income that can be applied for.

Three principles drive the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000:

• Young people should not leave Local Authority accommodation until they are ready and able to cope with the rigours of independent or semi-independent living;

• Young people should be central to the discussions and plans for their future;

• The Local Authority has a responsibility to act as a “good parent” to all young people whether Eligible, Relevant of Former Relevant and irrespective of formal legal status i.e. Care Order or Section 20.

For these reasons it is important that Eligible children subject to a Care Order do not have a financial incentive to leave the care system prematurely. As a consequence this category of children who move into semi or independent status should have access to no more or less resources than young people of a similar age who have “Relevant” status.

**Who Qualifies?**

This document details the financial arrangement for all young people leaving care for whom the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and Children and Social Work Act 2017 applies:

**Eligible** - those 16 and 17 year olds who are looked after and have been looked after for a period of 13 weeks (or periods amounting to 13 weeks) which began at or after the age of 14 years and ended after the age of 16 years.

**Relevant** - those 16 and 17 year olds who:

* Are no longer being looked after by any local authority but before ceasing to be looked after were an eligible child;
* At the age of 16 were detained or admitted to hospital but immediately before had been looked after by a local authority for a period of at least 13 weeks after reaching the age of 14;
* In circumstances where they have returned to live with their parent or other person withParental Responsibility(including someone who had a Child Arrangements Order prior to the Care Order) for a continuous period of 6 months they will no longer be a ‘relevant’ young person. However, if these living arrangements break down they will be treated as a ‘relevant’ child.

**Former Relevant Young People:**

* Aged 18 and above who have been an eligible or relevant child;
* Aged under 25 and still wish to receive support from the Local Authority.

**Qualifying Children** within Section 24(1). Any young person aged at least 16 but under 25 who ceases to be looked after or disabled and privately fostered after the age of 16, but do not qualify as eligible, relevant or former relevant.

Young people subject to a Special Guardianship Order who were looked after immediately before the making of the Special Guardianship Order may also qualify if:

* They are aged between 16 and 25;
* Were less than 18 when the special guardianship order came into force;
* If they are 18 years and above, have had a special guardianship order in force when they reached that age.

**Exceptions to the Duty to Maintain**

This duty does not apply to young people who:

* are looked after on a respite basis (less than four weeks), as they are not defined as eligible, even where the total period aggregated is 13 weeks.
* are Relevant young people who have returned home for a period of 6 months or more. Responsibility to advise and assist these young people will be covered under Section 24 of the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.
* are aged 16 to 21 whom Children’s social care has powers and duties, but fall outside of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

**What Are The Duties?**

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 was implemented on 1st October 2001 and places a duty upon the Local Authority to provide services to all eligible and relevant young people. This includes accommodation and maintenance in accordance with their Pathway Plan.

Eligible young people looked after by Herefordshire Council will have their accommodation and maintenance costs met in the same way as other looked after children in regulated care placements and supported accommodation.

Young people who are lone parents, people with long-term mental health problems, and young people with disabilities, willcontinue to be eligible for benefits such as Job Seekers Allowance, Income Support, Employment and Support Allowance and any other benefits due to them because of their disability or parental status; although they are still excluded from Housing Benefit and Local Housing Allowance until the age of 18.

Former relevant young people are entitled to claim benefits in the same way as any young person of their age. The Local Authority has a duty to provide assistance to former relevant and qualifying young people associated with employment, education and training. This includes providing holiday accommodation (or the funds to secure it) to care leavers in Higher Education or on a residential Further Education Course, which requires them to live away from home, as agreed in the Pathway Plan. The Department has the power to assist former relevant young people with maintenance and accommodation where it is deemed appropriate and this would be agreed as part of the Pathway Plan.

The Local Authority has a duty to “keep in touch” with all care leavers up until the age of 21. For care leavers aged 22-25 the duties introduced through the Children and Social Work Act 2017 – to assess care leavers needs and, develop and keep under review a Pathway plan – only apply where the young person requests support.

# 3. Principles

* All eligible and relevant young people to be assisted in opening a bank/ building society account for any regular Children’s Social Care allowances to be paid into. Arrangements for the payment of other amounts will be identified in the Pathway Plan and assistance given by the Personal Advisor in managing these allowances;
* Payments will be made to young people in a manner that ensures that their accommodation and maintenance needs are appropriately met. The ability of a young person to manage their finances will be part of their Needs Assessment. The Pathway Plan will reflect the most appropriate manner of providing financial support to the young person;
* All young people will be assisted to manage, organise and take responsibility for their own finances. The Personal Advisor and the Pathway Plan will identify the stage at which the young person is able to manage their finances themselves and up until that time will provide assistance. Care leavers with complex needs, including those with disabilities, may transfer directly to Adult Services and the Pathway Plan will need to ensure that this transition is seamless and supported;
* Clear assessment of the eligibility of young people for financial support will be undertaken in line with the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and Children and Social Work Act 2017;
* Clear records of all financial support provided to young people will be maintained and all payments will be properly authorised;
* The benefit entitlements of young people who are eligible, relevant or formally relevant will be assessed and appropriate steps taken to ensure they are taken up.

# 4. Financial support for care leavers

## 4.1 Accommodation Costs

4.11 Eligible young people

Young people in foster care or residential care will have placement costs met in full and there is scope to extend meeting these costs for the duration of the academic year in which their eighteenth birthday falls provided they are in education or training.

Young people living in semi-independent or independent accommodation will have their accommodation costs met in full where this has been agreed through the Pathway Plan. It would be unusual for an eligible young person to be assessed as able to live independently but if this was agreed then costs in respect of rent would not be expected to exceed the local rate for private independent tenancies. Rental and support costs for semi - independent accommodation will be met in full if agreed through the Pathway Planning process.

Young people living in supported lodgings or semi-independent accommodation who are in receipt of a maintenance allowance or are employed are expected to contribute £15 per week towards their bills (gas, electricity and water).

### 4.1.2 Relevant young people

Suitable accommodation will be agreed between the young person and the Department through the Pathway Plan.Accommodation costs in respect of rent would not be expected to exceed the local rate for private independent tenancies. Rental and support costs for semi - independent accommodation will be met in full if agreed through the Pathway Planning process.

Young people living in supported lodgings or semi-independent accommodation who are in receipt of a maintenance allowance or are employed are expected to contribute £15 per week towards their bills (gas, electricity and water).

### 4.1.3 Former relevant young people

All eligible young people will be offered the opportunity to “stay put” in their foster placement beyond the age of 18 should their carer agree. This will be dependent upon the young person actively seeking or being engaged with education, training or employment or exempt from this due to ill-health.

Personal Advisors will work with young people to identify suitable accommodation and support young people to make the right choice for them based on an assessment of need. Options are likely to include staying put, supported lodgings, supported housing (e.g. SHYPP or SHAC) or living independently.

Young people who are in a Staying Put or supported lodgings placement and are entitled to Housing Benefit will be expected to make a claim and pay this amount to their carer or supported lodgings provider (or agree for the payment to be made directly to the Council who will continue to pay the carer). Any shortfall between housing benefit and the placement costs will be met by Children’s Social Care.

Young people who are in a Staying Put or supported lodgings placement and are earning money at a rate that reduces their entitlement to Housing Benefit means they are not entitled to any Housing Benefit will be expected to contribute to their placement costs at the rate equivalent to Housing Benefit.

The costs of other housing options will usually be paid for by the young person directly from their income or through Housing Benefit.

Young people who are in Staying Put or supported lodgings placement will not be entitled to remain beyond the age of 21. These young people will be supported to move to semi-independent or independent accommodation or can negotiate a private arrangement with their Staying put or supported lodgings placement.

**Young People aged 18+** who are in Further Education or training; unemployed and actively seeking work; sick or disabled or those on low incomes are entitled to claim Housing Benefit.

**Aged 19+ in FE** they are not entitled to claim Housing Benefit and may need assistance with accommodation costs either from Children’s social care or Education Access funds.

**Aged 19+** in training; unemployed and actively seeking work; sick or disabled or on low incomes are entitled to claim Housing Benefit.

## 4.2 Income Maintenance

### 4.2.1 Eligible young people

Eligible young people living in foster care or residential care will have their maintenance payments met by their carer or residential unit. Arrangements for pocket money and taking a greater degree of responsibility for buying clothes and toiletries will be agreed in the placement plan and Pathway plan.

Eligible young people may be entitled to benefits such as Disability Living Allowance; they will be assisted to claim such benefits.

### 4.2.2 Relevant young people

All relevant young people who are unemployed, in education or training will be ensured a weekly allowance of the current Income Support/Jobs Seekers Allowance rate for a young person under 25. Training allowances will be taken into account as income. All young people will be expected to engage with education, training or employment. Those that are unemployed will be expected to actively seek work. If the Personal Advisor’s view is that the young person is not actively seeking work then their weekly allowance will be reduced by 60% until the young person re-engages. This is to reflect and help young people prepare for the expectations of the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).

Young people in employment will, in the event of their income being less than the current Income Support/Job Seekers rate, have their income topped up to that amount.

Young people who are living with a partner are entitled to receive a maintenance allowance.

### 4.2.3 Former relevant young people

Former Relevant young people are expected to receive their primary income support from the same methods as their contemporaries. It is recognised that a good parent continues to support their children into adulthood to ensure that the transition to adulthood is as smooth as possible by making up deficiencies in the formal system. Their Pathway Plan and financial arrangements need to ensure that this is a smooth transition with time to make appropriate adjustments.

Former Relevant young people via the Pathway Planning process will be assisted to receive all the financial assistance that they are entitled to.

There will be gaps in systems that Children’s Social Care will have a duty to fill. For example those aged 19 plus in Further Education and not accepted on the course prior to their 19th birthday are not entitled to claim Income Support and will need assistance from Children’s Social Care. Requests for assistance should be processed via the Personal Advisor and will be dependent upon the young person engaging fully with the Pathway Planning process. Agreement on the financial support will be according to the current departmental policy for delegation of decision making and budget controls.

**Former Relevant Young People with Disabilities**

Former Relevant young people with disabilities may continue to have needs over and above the needs of other young people. These needs may be the same needs that have already been identified via the Pathway Planning process, or may change as the young person enters adulthood. Either way any needs identified through the Pathway Planning process and/or Community Care Assessment need to be met.

## 4.3 Financial support to attend school, further education or training

### 4.3.1 Eligible, relevant and former relevant young people

Eligible young people who are in Year 11 will attract Pupil Premium. The best use of this will be discussed and agreed at Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings. This funding can be used to buy essential equipment and/or study aids.

Young people aged 16-19 who attend a registered education/training provision will be entitled to receive a [16-19 bursary](https://www.gov.uk/1619-bursary-fund) which can be used to pay for transport, purchase essential equipment, educational materials and books.

For young people not entitled to a 16-19 bursary funding for essential books and equipment will be based on assessed need and set out within the Pathway Plan. An application for funding will be made according to the current departmental policy for delegation of decision making and budget controls.

Young people who are at school or Further Education College and are required to attend field trips or residential courses will receive a payment to meet these costs in full from either 16-19 bursary, Further Education College Access Funds or Children’s Social Care (an application to Further Education Colleges Access Fund should be made if the 16-19 bursary is not available).

## 4.4 Costs Associated with Maintaining Contact with Family, Significant Others

### 4.4.1 Eligible young people

Eligible young people who have contact with family or other significant people will have agreed within their Pathway Plan arrangements for these contacts. Costs for maintaining contact will usually be met by the foster carer or residential unit and any additional funding to support this set out in the placement plan and/or contract.

### 4.4.2 Relevant and former relevant young people

Relevant and former relevant young people who have significant contacts with family or other significant people will be expected to plan and budget for contact jointly with their family and friends. Additional payments will only be made following a needs assessment. Details will need to be set out within the Pathway plan and agreement to meet the cost will be according to the current departmental policy for delegation of decision making and budget controls.

## 4.5 Clothing

### 4.5.1 Eligible young people

All eligible young people in a care placement are generally paid via their carer an allowance for clothing. This clothing allowance will be identified within their placement and reflected in their Pathway Plan.

### 4.5.2 Relevant and former relevant young people

All relevant and former relevant young people will receive a maintenance allowance and/or have their own income. Young people are expected to budget for clothes using their own finances. Young people may be assisted in “one off payments”. They would make the request via the Personal Advisor following a needs assessment. An application for funding will be made according to the current departmental policy for delegation of decision making and budget controls.

## 4.6 Hobbies/Sport/Leisure

### 4.6.1 Eligible young people

Eligible young people will be encouraged by their placement/carers to pursue hobbies and leisure interests. It would normally be expected that the cost of these are met either by the placement or the young person. If, through needs assessment and Pathway Planning, it is deemed appropriate for a young person to pursue a hobby, leisure or sporting interest for which it would be unreasonable to expect the young person or placement to fund, agreement may be given to meeting the cost.

Young people who are looked after are entitled to HALO vouchers. The vouchers can be requested as follows:

* 1 x Course Voucher per young person for the period of the specified course e.g. 10 weeks for swimming lessons
* 4 x single activity vouchers per month

### 4.6.2 Relevant and former relevant young people

Relevant and former relevant young people will be encouraged to pursue hobbies and leisure interests. They would normally be expected to fund these themselves as any interests need to be financially sustainable for a young person. In exceptional circumstances, if it is assessed as necessary and appropriate for a young person to pursue a hobby, leisure or sporting interest then agreement can be sought for specific and time limited funding. Agreement to meet the cost will be according to the current departmental policy for delegation of decision making and budget controls.

Young people who are care leavers can request HALO vouchers. If, through needs assessment and Pathway Planning, it is deemed appropriate for a young person to receive HALO vouchers then this will be set out in the Pathway Plan. The vouchers can be requested as follows:

• 1 x Course Voucher per young person for the period of the specified course e.g. 10 weeks for swimming lessons

• 4 x single activity vouchers per month

## 4.7 Driving lessons

Eligible, relevant and former relevant young people will be entitled to have their provisional driving licence paid for. This is irrespective of whether or not they intend to learn to drive but ensures that young people have a recognised identification document.

The department will fund up to a maximum of 20 hours driving lessons from a driving instructor that is approved and registered with the [Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/driver-and-vehicle-standards-agency) as long as the following criteria are met.

* The young person is in possession of a provisional licence (which means they must be at least 17);
* There is a need for the young person to be able to drive to enhance their education/training or employment prospects;
* The young person agrees to fund alternate driving lessons themselves;
* Approval has been obtained according to the current departmental policy for delegation of decision making and budget controls.

## 4.8 Holidays

### 4.8.1 Eligible young people

All eligible young people are entitled to an annual holiday grant of up to 2 weeks basic fostering allowance rate to enable them to have a holiday with their carers, friends or on their own. For young people living with foster carers this is usually paid to their carers. Arrangements for the allowance to be paid directly to the young person can be made if this is agreed in the placement plan and/or pathway plan.

Eligible young people in residential care should also be able to have a holiday. Arrangements for paying for this should be identified in the contract with the care providers.

### 4.8.2 Relevant and former relevant young people

Relevant and former relevant young people are not entitled to a holiday grant or allowance.

## 4.9 Birthday/Christmas

### 4.9.1 Eligible young people

All eligible young people in foster care receive, via their foster carer, a birthday and Christmas allowance. Eligible young people in residential care should also receive a birthday/Christmas allowance and this should be identified in the contract with the care providers.

### 4.9.2 Relevant and former relevant young people

Relevant and former relevant young people will receive a gift up to the value of £25 on their 17th, 19th and 20th birthday and £50 on their 18th and 21st birthday. In addition young people will receive a £30 meal voucher on their 18th and 21st birthday to enable them to celebrate with family and/or friends.

## 4.10 Child Care

Eligible, relevant or former relevant care leavers who are parents may need assistance with child care costs in order to access education, training or employment. Currently there are various schemes available to support these costs. Childcare will be discussed in the Pathway Planning process and young people will be assisted in accessing all available funding by their Social Worker or Personal Advisor. If this provision is not available free to the young person, an application for funding will be made according to the current departmental policy for delegation of decision making and budget controls.

## 4.11 Counselling

Eligible, relevant or former relevant young people should talk to their GP if they would like to see a counsellor or self-refer to the [CLD Trust](http://www.thecldtrust.org/the-cld-trust/) . If a young person needs any financial support to access suitable counselling, this can be agreed in the Pathway Plan. An application for funding will be made according to the current departmental policy for delegation of decision making and budget controls.

## 4.12 Cultural and Religious Needs

It would normally be expected that the cost of cultural and/or religious needs are met either by the placement or the young person. If, through needs assessment and Pathway Planning, it is deemed appropriate for a young person to receive additional support then this will be set out in the Pathway Plan.

## 4.13 Special Needs

Any special needs should be identified through the needs assessment/Pathway Planning process. Agreement to meet the cost will be according to the current departmental policy for delegation of decision making and budget controls.

## 4.14 Young People in custody

Young people accommodated in a Youth Offenders’ Institution will receive a pocket money allowance of £10.00 per month (to be agreed with the relevant establishment).

## 4.15 Former unaccompanied asylum seeking children

Schedule 3 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 makes particular categories of people ineligible to receive leaving care support, because of their immigration status. If a former UASC care leaver has not been recognised as a refugee or been granted any other valid form of leave to remain, and becomes “appeal rights exhausted” (ARE) they will fall into the 4th category of “ineligible person” listed in Schedule 3. The Home Office ceases to provide leaving care funding to the local authority three months after the individual becomes ARE. In these circumstances, the local authority will only be able to continue to provide support to the extent necessary to avoid a breach of the person’s rights under the European Convention on Human Rights.

Former unaccompanied children who have failed to establish any lawful basis to remain in the UK as an adult, as well as those who are in the asylum process, will generally be eligible for practical and financial assistance and support in returning to their home country from the Voluntary Returns Service, run by the Home Office. Further information is available online at [www.gov.uk/return-home-voluntarily](http://www.gov.uk/return-home-voluntarily)

# 5. Care Leavers Entering Higher Education

## 5.1 Student finance

All young people applying for Higher Education need to make an application through the [student finance](https://www.gov.uk/student-finance) system which is designed to ensure that the applicant is not required to provide money upfront to start at University.

The finance available is a maintenance and a tuition fee loan which will be repaid once a Care Leaver has started employment and earnings reach the relevant threshold for repayment.

Loans from Student Finance England for living costs for students are means-tested; this means that the amount that applicants receive is based upon the family income. However, for young people leaving care it is highly likely that they will be classed as independent and so will be eligible for the maximum amount of financial support available through the student finance system.

Appointments with the careers advisor linked to the college or school which the young person attends will advise the young person on the completion of the application via [UCAS](https://www.ucas.com/) and provide information about university courses which a young person could apply for.

The Foster Carer, Social Worker and/or Personal Advisor will also support young people in making these applications.

Many universities have student support officers assisting care leavers in higher education and share information about their Care Leaver Offer on their individual University website. It is important for the young person to check what the Universities offer as this will support them to understand the quality of support they will be offered as a Care Leaver.

The [Propel](http://propel.org.uk/UK/) and [Standalone](https://www.standalone.org.uk/guides/student-guide/) websites provides lots of useful information for Care Leavers considering higher education.

## 5.2 Additional bursaries and scholarships

In addition to the financial support provided by Student Finance England the young person should apply for the additional bursaries and scholarships that are offered by organisations and Universities which can assist in supplementing a young person’s income. This can assist in reducing potential risk of debts being accrued during time at University.

Most Higher Education Institutions will offer their own financial support package specific to Care Leavers. This may take the form of a bursary or scholarship; or waiving of fees. Some universities offer additional financial support towards accommodation. This could reduce the amount of maintenance loan that a Care Leaver could choose to request.

The Higher Education Institutions will all have their own eligibility criteria and are often only available to a limited number of qualifying students. Each institution will decide how much support they offer and who they offer it to. Care Leavers are often a priority group to support for universities. It is also of note that bursaries and scholarship payments do not have to be repaid.

## 5.3 Support from Children’s Social Care

When a young person is planning to attend university it is important to make their Social Worker or Personal Advisor aware as soon as possible so they can assist in exploring options and the financial support available at each university. The Pathway Plan needs to be updated at this point to include the courses the young person is wishing to consider, completing it with details of course length and whether this is full-time/part-time/distance learning and what qualification they will receive at the end. It is important that all of this information is included for a young person to refer to.

All young people applying for Higher Education will be subject to a financial assessment by Children’s Social Care which will take account of any capital owned by the young person.

Young people who receive benefits will be expected to fund their accommodation and manage their living expenses. Disabled and lone parents can claim certain benefits and assistance will be given by the Personal Advisor to access all eligible benefits available.

All relevant young people entering University or higher education equivalent are entitled to receive a £2,000 Higher Education Care Leavers bursary from Children’s Social Care. This will be paid for each year of study i.e. if this is a 3 year B.A (Hons) then this will be paid for three years. The first payment will be paid into the young person’s bank account on confirmation/proof of acceptance onto the course via UCAS at the beginning of term i.e. September/October.

This HE Care Leavers bursary will fund a first degree undergraduate degree, it will not extend to a second undergraduate degree. If an undergraduate degree is commenced and not completed, funding is not guaranteed to be extended to an application for a further bursary such an application will have to be made in writing to the Team Manager of the 16+ Team and a reasonable explanation will have to be provided for why the initial course was not completed and was not suitable for the Care Leaver.

The HE Care Leavers bursary funds undergraduate courses for three years. If a course is longer than three years, for example medicine and dentistry, termly bursary payments will continue for the term of the course.

For those young people progresses to the 2nd or 3rd year of study written confirmation of enrollment on the next year of study will be required before payment is made.

Applications for support to fund an education bursary for post graduate courses and PhD’s will need to be made in writing to the Team Manager of the 16+ Team with an updated Pathway Plan which details the course details, length etc. alongside a Financial Assessment of the young person’s circumstances. Each post graduate course request will be considered on merit and determined case by case with the approval sought from the Director of Children's Services.

The HE Care Leavers bursary is usually paid in regular instalments (fortnightly) by Children’s Finance although the timings of bursary payments can be agreed between the Care Leaver and the local authority if there is a need to vary this.

If for any reason a young person needs to take a leave of absence from their studies it is important that the young person informs their P.A within two weeks. This is to ensure that additional payments of the bursary are halted whilst the P.A meets with the young person to review their circumstances, and support can be provided to the Care Leaver to access any additional professional support and begin making applications for relevant benefits.

The P.A will support the young person to liaise with Student Support services at the University and their Course Tutor (should this be assessed as of benefit to the young person) to plan for the young person’s return to university and implement any additional support that the young person needs. The Pathway Plan should be updated at this point.

If a young person starts a university course before the age of 25 the Local Authority will continue to offer the young person an Education Bursary for the duration of the course beyond their 25th birthday until the completion of that course. They will also continue to have support from a Personal Advisor whereby their Pathway Plan will be updated every 6 months, or earlier if significant changes occur in the young person’s circumstance.

If a young person takes a leave of absence on medical grounds, medical evidence needs to be obtained by the young person and shared with children’s social care. The P.A will assist the young person through the process of taking a leave of absence and will update the Pathway Plan with this information to ensure that when the young person is fit and well enough to return to university their support begins again. The HE Care Leavers Bursary will not be paid during any leave of absence from study.

If a young person fails to notify the Local Authority that they have left their course or are on a leave of absence within two weeks and consequently receives payments that they are not entitled to under this policy then the Local Authority will consider recouping any money paid.

The L.A will provide a bursary for one repeat year only if a leave of absence is taken.

## 5.4 Accommodation and university life

If a young person is requesting to remain with their carers whilst completing a Higher Education course this will need to be agreed in the Pathway plan. The young person will apply for the maintenance loan to pay towards the rent. The local authority will continue to pay the fostering allowance and skills fees if the young person remains with their foster carer or a rent allowance at the same level set by independent providers for Supported Lodging Schemes within Herefordshire, according to relevant circumstances. An application for funding will be made according to the current departmental policy for delegation of decision making budget controls.

The social life at University is obviously an important part of the experience and it is recommended that young people should take on holiday work to supplement their grant and maintenance allowance to meet the costs of their social life.

If there is a shortfall between the maintenance loan, tuition fee loan and accommodation costs in mid-range student accommodation Children’s Social Care will provide funding to meet reasonable costs. Any additional costs must be approved in advance by Team Manager of the 16+ team. Through the Pathway Planning process a budget plan will be drawn up to assist the young person to determine how they cover expenses. This would cover such things as:

* Living expenses;
* Bills;
* Travel;
* Education materials;
* Specialist equipment.

Children’s Social Care may also provide for accommodation costs during vacations either through a rent allowance or provision of an amount equivalent to the fostering allowance and skills band fee if the young person stays with their previous foster carer. This would need to be discussed and agreed in advance through the Pathway plan.

During the summer vacation there is an expectation that young people will actively seek paid employment.

Approval for all the above funding will be according to the current departmental policy for delegation of decision making and budget controls.

# 6. Financial Support for Young People Who Qualify for Assistance under Section 24 of the Act (Qualifying care leavers)

Young people who qualify for assistance under Section 24 of the Children Act continue to be eligible to claim Income Support, Housing Benefit or Universal Credit. It is recognised that on occasions young people face short-term problems caused for instance by delays in the processing of claims. Payments can be made in these circumstances at the discretion of Children’s Social Care.

The principles by which decisions are made should be the following:

* Every effort must be made to ensure that formal systems of maintenance have been explored;
* The young person is making the appropriate effort to gain the financial support from the formal system. If a young person has failed to take the appropriate steps then this in itself will not exclude financial support, however any financial support offered should be accompanied by clear expectations placed upon the young person as to what he/she needs to do;
* The amount of payment should be based on an assessment of what is the minimum required to ensure the young person’s basic subsistence needs are met until he/she is able to access formal systems;
* Requests for money for food should be met wherever possible by worker accompanying the young person to purchase an appropriate amount of groceries. Gift cards should only be provided in circumstances where it is not possible to accompany the young person. In these circumstances receipts should be requested of the young person on next contact, as the best method of ensuring the money is spent as intended;
* Any payments made to a young person must be made in such a way as to ensure that they understand it to be an ad hoc payment. Every effort must be made to ensure that the young person understands that a payment does not mean that any future request would be agreed;
* Approval for funding will be made according to the current departmental policy for delegation of decision making and budget controls.

## 6.1 Assistance associated with employment, education and training up to the age of 25 years where connected to a course of education or training

Young people who qualify for assistance under Section 24 of the Children Act will be provided with resources to ensure that they have the financial means to attend work, school, college or training. The expectation will be that Education/ College Access Funds will be the primary source of finance for education purposes, with Children’s Social Care acting to meet any short fall.

Children’s Social Care will help with finance for essential items of equipment required to successfully complete the course. Each request will be dealt with on its own merit. In the case of education/ training young people will be supported up to the age of 25.

## 6.2 Assistance to young people subject to Special Guardianship Order

Young people deemed ‘qualifying’ as a result of being looked after immediately prior to becoming subject to a special guardian order will be provided with advice and assistance to access the means to be able to attend work, school, college, Higher Education or training.

Periodic payments paid to Special Guardians for the maintenance of the young person, under a Special Guardianship Order Support plan, may continue while a young person is in full-time education and training post 18, which should cover the ongoing accommodation and maintenance costs. However, the payments cease if the young person ceases to have a home with the special guardian or the young person enters full time employment or claims benefits in their own right or they are 18 years or over and not in full time education or training.

Therefore the 16+ team will assess the needs of individual young people based on what other financial support may be available. Consideration will be given to providing financial support at the same rates as Former Relevant young people, including that provided to Former Relevant young people entering Higher Education.

## 6.3 Care Leavers 16 - 24 in Higher Education, or on a residential Further Education course

Children’s Social Care will provide support (including financial if required) in finding vacation accommodation for young people in this category.

# 7. Leaving care grants

The Leaving Care grant is intended to help care leavers establish themselves independently for the first time. The Grant can be up to a maximum of £2,000 and can be accessed up to the age of 25. The process for identifying need is as follows:

* The Personal Advisor and the young person agree via the Pathway planning process that the young person is ready for independence or semi-independence;
* Suitable accommodation is identified;
* The Personal Advisor will ensure the young person has sufficient support to ensure the process of purchasing and receiving the items occurs in an orderly and coherent way;
* The Personal Advisor will be responsible for providing receipts and accounting for the money spent.

## 7.1 Leaving care grant procedure

* Personal Advisor to request the £2,000 grant as soon as suitable accommodation is identified.
* Personal Advisor to provide a list of essential items needed by the young person with the estimated costing through our approved suppliers. Personal Adviser to be as accurate as possible regarding the essential items needed.
* Personal Adviser to complete financial request form and send through to Childrens Finance.
* Childrens finance will seek manager approval through the financial system.
* Childrens finance to arrange the order of the items where applicable.
* Finance Support Officer to ensure money is accounted and recorded for each individual through the financial system
* Finance Support Officer to reconcile the individual balances with the financial system on monthly basis and Admin Manager will arrange for a spot check audit to be carried out on a quarterly basis.

# 8. Emergency Payments

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced a new duty on local authorities to have regard to corporate parenting principles and as such the local Authority is expected to think and act as a “good parent”. No good parent would allow their child to be either roofless or without food or clothing. Equally, however, no good parent would allow their child to consistently manipulate to secure money without addressing the reasons for this and taking appropriate action.

There is a potential tension between the two principles of good parenting. The way to synthesise those principles is to reduce emergency payments to the minimum.

* Wherever possible emergency help should be sought from universal and community services e.g. food banks;
* Wherever possible emergency help should be provided in kind rather than cash e.g. the purchase of food or offer of food vouchers;
* External verification for the need for the support should be sought wherever possible;
* The amount should be based upon what is required to surmount the present crisis;
* Unless there is good grounds to think otherwise the presumption should be made that the young person is presenting an authentic case;
* Wherever possible the young person should be asked to provide proof that cash given was spent legitimately e.g. receipts.
* Young people should always be expected to talk about the reasons behind the presenting crisis and supported to work with the Personal Advisor to address the reasons leading to the crisis.

# 9. Useful links

[Coram Voice](http://www.coramvoice.org.uk/young-peoples-zone/am-i-care-leaver?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIw8TOp_bW1wIVorvtCh3CjAgWEAAYASAAEgLU_PD_BwE)

[Propel](http://propel.org.uk/UK/)

[Rees - the care leavers foundation](https://www.reesfoundation.org/our-services/financial-support/)

[Strong young minds project](https://www.thesymproject.org/)

[CLD Trust](http://www.thecldtrust.org/the-cld-trust/)

[Princes Trust](https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/help-for-young-people/get-funding-train-learn)