**Young Care Leavers Protocol**

 Joint Protocol between:

Jobcentre Plus and

Devon

Leaving Care Teams

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**Background**

Care leavers are one of the most vulnerable groups of young people in society. Young people who enter local authority care can, if not adequately supported, leave care with poor educational attainment and low aspirations which can result in long term unemployment. We believe that every young person should be encouraged and supported to plan their future careers and achieve their potential through learning new skills and having a wide range of practical experiences. In Devon we are committed to raising young people’s aspirations by providing on-going support to help them make positive decision s about their future.

**Aims of the Protocol**

Jobcentre Plus and Devon Council will work together to provide an enhanced service to support young people leaving care into education, employment and training. This will ensure:-

* Co-ordinated support to engage young people into Education, Employment or Training
* An early entry system and a smooth transition for those young people leaving care and needing to claim benefits
* Prompt and accurate payment of benefits where these are required
* Young people are empowered and enabled to gain sustainable paid employment through individual route ways

**Jobcentre Plus will:**

* Provide Care leaver team with up to date contact details for work coaches supporting care leavers
* Provide an early entry system for care leavers ( processing forms in readiness for 18th birthday)
* Ensure a warm handover – a three way diagnostic interview between the young person, work coach and care leaver team.
* Work coaches will ensure that the young person is aware of all assistance available to them via the Youth Contract.
* The first time a care leaver fails to attend an appointment with JCP, the work coach will contact the young person wherever possible and reiterate conditionality before considering a sanction.
* When required a three way case conference should be arranged with young person, care leaver team and work coach.
* Work coaches to consider additional support products for care leavers through its flexible support fund
* Jobcentre Plus will incorporate this protocol into operational policies

**LA Care Leaver Team will :**

* Provide DWP with up to date contact details for the Care Leaver team
* Gain consent from the young people to share information with DWP, using DWP consent form. (Appendix 3)
* Will inform DWP of care leavers (by district) of those already 18 years + (with young person’s consent)
* Will inform DWP in advance of looked after young people nearing 18 years and support processing of paperwork for an early entry system (with young person’s consent)
* Ensure that young people are aware of the enhanced service they will receive from DWP
* Ensure a warm handover – 3 way diagnostic interview at start of the claim for benefit
* Will re-iterate conditionality with care leaver if/when the first infringement occurs
* Where appropriate, the LA key worker to attend case conferencing to support the young person on their recommended pathway
* On going support to the care leaver and liaison with JCP, ensuring that JCP are notified of any changes in the young person’s circumstances, e.g. finishing education, a change of address or returning to parental home.
* Will incorporate this protocol into operational policies

**Summary**

 Devon Council and DWP aim to support young people leaving care to access an enhanced service. It is hoped that working together supporting these young people, outcomes and aspirations will increase, enabling and empowering them to gain sustainable employment.

Signed by DWP

Position

Signature

Date

Signed by Local Authority

Position

Signature

Date

The aim of this protocol is to make it easier for young people leaving care in Devon to apply for benefits prior to their 18th birthday. It is recognised that when care leavers first enter the benefit system, the complexity of the system combined with the complex issues faced by care leavers often result in lengthy payment delays for the young person and financial cost to the Local Authority in ‘holding payments’ paid to bridge the gap until benefits are in place.

**BENEFIT CLAIM PROCESS**

The following process will be available to all Devon LA Care Leavers.

**LA Care Leaver’s Team will**:

Six months before the Care Leaver‘s 18th birthday the CLT/PA will ensure that the Care Leaver has, or is working towards getting:

* Their National Insurance Number.
* Two forms of identification including photographic ID, this could be a driving licence, birth certificate, a home office resident permit, passport
* A Bank Account.
* A CV, an email and Universal Jobmatch account
* A Plan that includes education, training and employment hopes for the future.
* A letter confirming the Care Leaver (CL) is estranged and is just leaving care.
* Care Leavers in full time education will need a letter from the college confirming course name, start and expected end date and hours of the course.

All of the above will need to be in place by the time the Care Leaver is 17years and 11 months.

**Care Leaver – advanced claim process for JSA/ESA/IS**

* Four weeks prior to the CL’s 18th birthday, the LA Leaving Care Team contact the specialist care leaver work coach (SCLWC) to inform them that the young person will be leaving care on their 18th birthday and wants to make an advanced claim.
* The (SCLWC) gathers the necessary information to determine what type of claim needs to be made and issues the appropriate benefit claim form, JSA1S, ESA1 or A1.
* The SCLWC sets up an Labour Market System [LMS] record and populates LMS care leaver marker, sets up caseload.
* LA leaving care team supports the young person to complete the benefit claim form along with the care leaver consent to share form (Appendix 3), LA confirmation of care leaver status. (Appendix 1). All three to be returned to DWP 2 weeks prior 18th birthday.
* The SCLWC checks the claim form and appendices and then sends to appointed person at the benefit centre and marks as care leaver priority by attaching appendix 2.
* The SCLWC will then book an Work Focused interview on YP’s 18th birthday a date nearest to (after birthday) For IS a First WFI First Chance interview.
* YP attends new WFI along with their LA Key worker. They must attend on time and bring with them a copy of the Care Leavers ETE plan or Pathway Plan, ID and any other evidence required.
* (Note: Any ID evidence e.g. birth certificate, passport must not be sent to Benefit Delivery Centre but taken to the local Jobcentre for the Adviser to view and record.)
* The SCLWC contacts the Benefit Centre named contact to confirm YP attendance and to pay claim as a priority.

**In addition Income Support claims** will needto supplyproof they are attending a course of education to include name of course, start and expected end date, days and times of attendance. The SCLWC will complete an EF1 form (Appendix 4) and send to the Benefit Centre.

If Care Leaver completes or stops their education the LA will notify the named contact at DWP/ SCLWC or Benefit Centre.

Universal Credit is not included in the protocol as there is no advance process at the present time and will not be brought in until digital role out in 2017.

The SCLWC will conduct the Work Focused Interview with the Care Leaver and LA key worker and

* Will use the ETE or Pathway Plan to support the Claimant Commitment
* Handle any evidence required including ID requirements and note on LMS
* Ensure Care Leaver pilot marker is set if they fall within the DWP definition of a Care Leaver.

‘*A care leaver is a person who has been in local authority care (e.g. residential or foster care) for a period of at least 13 weeks or more, or periods amounting in total to 13 weeks or more, since they were age 14, and ending after age 16’*

After the ‘Care leaver’ marker is set on LMS it should only be ‘exited’ it if was set in error. This is to ensure that DWP can track Care leavers throughout their lifetime. If a claimant finds a job and reclaims benefits a later date the marker should still remain in place.

As part of the commitment to support care leavers the Department for Education has strengthened guidance for the LA to support those aged 21-24 who are in or wish to return to education or training

* Make a note in the action plan/MORE box of LA key workers name and contact details and that consent has been given to discuss the claim.
* Check OPSTRAT [computer system] and confirm when first payment will be received with CL. These details to be recorded on LMS.
* Care Leavers in receipt of JSA have early voluntary access to the Work Programme.
* If the Care Leaver fails to attend any future appointments or there are other issues the Work Coach will contact the LA key worker to discuss.

**Benefit Centre Named Contact will**

1. Take receipt of clerical claim form and consent form.
2. Pass to the processing team and ensure it is treated as a priority.
3. Note systems to show consent has been given by Care Leaver to discuss with LA key worker.
4. Liaise with the Care Leaver or LA key worker if any further information is required in order to process the claim.
5. Be the point of contact for local JCP sites and the LA key worker if benefit issues arise.

**Jobcentre Plus Named Contacts**

Carolyn Horton Barnstaple Jobcentre Plus

Tel: 01271 395476 CAROLYN.HORTON@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK

Paul Garnsey Bideford Jobcentre Plus

Tel: 01237 496901 PAUL.GARNSEY@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK

Bill McKelvie Exeter Jobcentre Plus

Tel : 01392 473911 WILLIAM.MCKELVIE@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK

Elaine Seatherton Tiverton Jobcentre Plus

Tel: 01884 703034 ELAINE.SEATHERTON@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK

Sue Evans Honiton Jobcentre Plus

Tel: 01404 403210 SUE.EVANS4@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK

JSA Benefit Centre - **FOR OWN OFFICE**

Elizabeth Carter Tel: 01903 223582

IS Benefit Centre - **FOR OWN OFFICE**

Graham Fish Tel: 01452 366110

NB. If sending post internally please send in a purple poly to named contact.

**DCC contact**

Kate Clark [PA to Dawn Stabb – Virtual School Head] 01392 384786

Kate.Clarke@devon.gov.uk

Appendix 1

Local Authority letter confirming Care Leaver status



Appendix 2

Care Leaver Priority Claim Cover Sheet



Appendix 3

Local Authority Consent



Appendix 4

Estrangement Form (EF1)

