**Practice Guide: Care Leavers**

**This Practice Guide has been created in response to learning identified from previously auditing Care Leavers. Understanding the duties and responsibilities we have towards Care Leavers can be confusing and at times has led to overall audit grades and sub-sections grades being awarded incorrectly.**

**This guide is designed to support auditors when auditing the service and support delivered to our young people who are care experienced. This guide must be read in conjunction with Practice Standards, Casefile Audit Guidance and Grade Descriptors.**

**Eligible children** are young people who:

* Are aged 16 or 17 in care (it doesn’t matter where they are living, it could be foster care, a children’s home, in semi-independent accommodation or even at home).
* Have been in care for over 13 weeks since their 14th birthday (this time does not have to be all at the same time).
* 16 and 17 year olds on a secure remand in a secure children’s home, secure training centre or Young Offender Institution are considered to be in care. This means that the time they spend on remand is counted for the period of 13 weeks needed to become Eligible children.
* Coming into care after the age of 16 does not affect a young person’s status as a care leaver, as long as the criteria above are met.

***Note that if young person is aged 16 or 17 and on a care order they are an eligible child irrespective of where they are living.***

Leaving Care duties:

* **Appoint a Personal Advisor**
* **Make an assessment of their needs**
* Prepare and review your care plan and pathway plan (Young people should have a pathway plan at 15 years and 9 months and this would supersede a care plan)
* Pay for your accommodation
* Pay for your subsistence
* Visit you regularly

**Relevant children** are young people: Aged 16 or 17 who:

* Left care on or after their 16th birthday, who were in care from the age of 14 for a period of at least 13 weeks (this time does not need to be continuous).
* 16 and 17 year olds on remand in a secure children’s home, Secure Training Centre or Young Offender Institution are considered to be looked after and therefore the time on remand is counted for the period of 13 weeks needed to become relevant children.
* Coming into care after the age of 16 does not affect a young person’s status as a care leaver, as long as the criteria above are met.
* The category of relevant children includes several groups of young people, depending on where they are living if the criteria above are still met:

**Young People who go back home**

* Young people aged 16 or 17 who have gone home are considered to be relevant children for the first six months they are living at home. “Going home” means that there was a planned move for the young person to move back to his or her parent(s), someone with parental responsibility or someone who had a residence order before the young person went into care.
* After the first six months the relevant child status is lost and the young person becomes a qualifying care leaver.
* The relevant child status is restored if it does not work out at home. The category of relevant children includes several groups of young people, depending on

**Young people in the youth justice system**

* Young people who on their 16th birthday were in a secure children’s home, Secure Training Centre or a Young Offenders Institution and immediately before that had been a looked after child who was voluntarily accommodated or on secure remand.

**Young people in hospital**

* Young people who on their 16th birthday were in hospital and immediately before that had been a looked after child who was voluntarily accommodated.

**Leaving Care Team must:**

* Appoint a Personal Adviser
* Make an assessment of their needs.
* Prepare a Pathway Plan.
* Review the Pathway Plan
1. Young person 18-21 years every 6 months
2. 21-25 years every 12 months (or as agreed by the manager)
* Find somewhere suitable to live.
* Provide financial support (if unable to claim benefits)
* Keep in touch

**Former relevant**

* Aged between 18 and up to 21 and have previously been a relevant child or an eligible child.
* Aged between 21 and up to 25, have previously been a relevant or eligible child, and have requested support from Children’s Services.

Since April 2018 the law says that all former relevant children are entitled to support from Children’s Services up to the age of 25. This means that if the leaving care team stops supporting at age 21, but the young person finds that they need support before reaching 25, they can ask for the support they need.

**The expectations of Children’s Services when aged 18-20 years.**

* Listen to their wishes and feelings
* Keeping in touch with young person
* Visit regularly.
* Provide a named Personal Advisor.
* Review the Pathway Plan every 6 months as a minimum but more often if this is what is needed.
* Provide or pay for accommodation during college or university holidays if the young person is studying away from home.
* Provide other support by buying the items young person needs to the extent their welfare and education needs require.
* Give a £2,000 grant if young person is in higher education.
* Discuss future support wishes and needs with young person prior to their 21st birthday and confirm whether they still wish to receive support beyond their 21st birthday.
* Give you information about their rights and entitlements up to age 25.

**The expectations of Children’s Services when aged 21- 24 years old**

* Contact the young person to inform them of their right to request support at least once a year, if they are over 21 and until they are 25 and if they haven’t been in touch with Children’s Services for some time.
* The contact once a year may be to their last address, or the last telephone number Children’s Services had for them.
* Give information about their rights and entitlements up to age 25.
* Complete an assessment to identify what support they need and what Children’s Services can do to help.
* Provide a Personal Adviser and provide support for as long as that issue remains and address any new issues if this is what they want.
* Prepare a full or partial pathway plan and review if appropriate.
* Support up to age 25 if they have needs as assessed by Children’s Services and can be helped by them.

**Qualifying care leavers**

Young people aged between 16 and up to 21 (or up to 25 if you are in education) who:

* Left care on or after their 16th birthday and who were looked after for less than 13 weeks since their 14th birthday.
* Are on a special guardianship order or were on a special guardianship order when they reached the age of 18 and were looked after immediately before the making of that order.
* Relevant children who have returned home for six months or more.

**The expectations of Children’s Services**

* Give advice and support and keep in touch with young person
* Provide or pay for accommodation during college or university holidays if young person is studying full-time away from home, up to the age of 25.

All young people - Eligible, Relevant or Former Relevant - must receive a multi-agency assessment of their needs as to the advice, assistance and support they will need when leaving care.

The Social Worker should write the child’s first Pathway Plan at 15 years and 9 months. The young person's social worker is responsible for coordinating the Needs Assessment which formulates the Pathway Plan.

This assessment should be completed no more than 3 months after the young person's 16th birthday or after the young person becomes Eligible or Relevant if this is later.

**Visiting young People - Eligible and Relevant**

18-21 years – 8 weekly

21-25 years – 12 weekly (or as outlined within the pathway plan)

If a young person is in education away from home, visits are during term times and through phone calls

**Frequency of Reviews:**

Young person 18 - 21 years every 6 months

21 - 25 years every 12 months (or as agreed in supervision)

**Frequency of supervision**

Children up to the age of 18- supervision is monthly (as per practice standards)

18- 25 Years - 8 weekly supervision

If the young person is on the virtual PA list then no supervision is required

**Virtual PA**

This is for young people who do not have a PA – have been deallocated a Personal Advisor. A young person aged 21 years and over can decline a service from the Care Leavers Team.

Virtual PA is managed through a duty system if a young person contacts the team needing support or advice.

**Joint housing protocol** – this protocol only applies in respect of Herefordshire and no other local authorities

**Multi-agency working** – The Care Leavers Team can only contact other services if young adult has provided consent, unless safeguarding concerns arise.

**Pathway Plans**

The Pathway Plan should be completed when the young person is 15 years and 9 months. Once a Pathway Plan has been completed it supersedes the young person’s Care Plan.

The IRO service look to the Pathway Plan as the document used in LAC Reviews.

**Qualifying care leavers do not have a Pathway Plan or a PA but can get a Leaving Care Grant (at the local authority’s discretion).**

If auditors require additional support in understanding the duties and responsibilities of the Children’s Services regarding Care Leavers, then please contact the QA Team on CYPQA@herefordshire.gov.uk.