



# Children We Care For and Care Leavers Needs Assessment & Pathway Plan Guidance



## Children We Care For and Care Leavers Needs Assessment & Pathway Plan Guidance

The new combined Needs Assessment and Pathway Plan has been co designed with Care Leavers.

The aim of this guidance is for Social Workers and Personal Advisors to know when and how to complete a Need Assessment and Pathway Planning for Children We Care For and Care Leavers.

The purpose of the new combined Needs Assessment and Pathway Planning is to make sure pathway planning is informed by an up-to-date assessment and our young people have the right support and time to prepare before they turn 18 years of age. We know transitioning to adulthood and leaving care is a huge step and successful pathway planning requires Social Workers and Personal Advisors to be creative when engaging young people to think about what they want to achieve, where they want to live and who can support them to achieve their goals and aspirations. Post 18, good pathway planning will make sure we continue to support our care leavers up to 21 and or up to 25 if they are in education or if they wish to continue with support.

Research and practice shows young people who have been looked after will have the best chance of success as an adult if those providing transitional care and support take the following principles into account in talking to the young person and when making any decision:

- Is this good enough for my own child
- Is this tailored to their individual needs, particularly if they are more vulnerable than other young people
- Providing a second chance if things don't go as expected

Procedures Guidance and Standards West Sussex Children's Services Procedures are available on TriX through the Point or here <https://www.proceduresonline.com/westsussex/cs/> This sets out how all staff must work with children, young people and families. The key elements staff need to be aware of are:

- Procedures - this contains the main policies and procedures that ensure we comply with the law and statutory guidance when safeguarding the needs of the children and families we work with;
- Practice Guidance - contains local guidance, tools and other information that supports and complements the policies and procedures in the procedures section; To add link when signed off
- West Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership is a partnership of all the different organisations working to protect children and young people across the county.

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### 1. Legal Context

This guidance is based upon the legislative requirements and regulations set out in:

- The statutory definition and requirements to undertake a Needs Assessment, prepare a Pathway Plan, keep the Pathway Plan under review and appoint a Personal Adviser are covered by Regulations 42, 43 and 44 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010.
- The Children Act 1989
- The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers
- The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010
- Children and Social Work Act 2017
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### 2. Definitions of young people and their rights

#### Legal Context and Definitions

The guidance is based upon the legislative requirements and regulations set out in •

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- The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010
- Children and Social Work Act 2017

Care Leavers who meet criteria of Eligible, Relevant and Former Relevant below are entitled to support as follows:

### **Eligible Child**

- Young person aged 16 and 17
- Young Person will have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14
- Young person is still looked after
- Entitled to, a Personal Advisor, a Needs Assessment, a Pathway Plan, receive all the care and support they normally receive until they leave care.

### **Relevant Child**

- Young person aged 16 and 17
- Looked after by children's services for a period of 13 weeks since the age of 14
- Looked after for a period of time after their 16th birthday
- No longer looked after
- Entitled to: a Personal Advisor, a Needs Assessment, a Pathway Plan, Accommodation and maintenance financial support to meet education, training and employment needs

### **Former Relevant Child**

- Aged between 18 and 21 or between 21 and 25 if still in education
- Previously an eligible child and/or a relevant child
- Entitled to: a Personal Advisor, a Pathway Plan kept under regular review, assistance with employment, education and training, assistance with accommodation and help with living costs.
- Once a former relevant child becomes 21, they can choose whether to continue to have support and this can continue until they are 25.

### **Qualifying child**

- Aged between 16 and 21 or between 16 and 25 if still in full-time education
- Looked after by children's services on, or after, their 16th birthday and no longer looked after
- Spent less than 13 weeks in care since 14th birthday, i.e. do not fulfil criteria for eligible or relevant child
- Entitled to, Advice and assistance from Leaving Care Service which may, be financial help with living expenses and if they are in higher education, they may also help with securing vacation accommodation. There is not an automatic entitlement to a Pathway Plan or Personal Advisor. An assessment will inform whether this is required.

### **Qualifying Child:**

Special Guardianship Order

- Young person age 18-25
- You were being looked after immediately before a Special Guardianship Order was made
- Advice and assistance from Leaving Care Service which may, be financial help with living expenses and if they are in higher education, they may also help with securing vacation accommodation. There is not an automatic entitlement to a Pathway Plan or Personal Advisor. An assessment will inform whether this is required.

### **3. 5 top tips from Care Leavers Advisory Board (CLAB) for Social Workers and Personal Advisors when completing Need Assessment and Pathway Planning**

1. Try to make it more fun – sit somewhere nice to fill it out, maybe in the YP's favourite place
2. Include the young person in the pathway plan throughout – confirm with the YP that everything recorded is accurately written
3. Sometimes it is better to just listen rather than always trying to find a solution
4. Complete it without judgement – not everything we talk about is easy for us to share
5. Do it *with* us rather than *to* us

### **4. Need Assessment & Pathway Planning**

The combined Needs Assessment and Pathway Plan should be prepared for all children we care for as soon as possible after the age of 15 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> by the Social Worker in collaboration with the Personal Advisor if involved and completed no later than 12 weeks after the young person's 16<sup>th</sup> birthday or within 13 weeks of becoming Eligible or Relevant if this is later.

From 16, the new Needs Assessment and Pathway Plan document will replace the Social Work Assessment and Care Plan. The Needs Assessment will inform the development of the Pathway Planning (which will be based on and include the young person's Care Plan, if previously under the age of 16).

Where the young person continues to be Looked After, the Placement Plan/Placement Information Record should describe what arrangements have been made within the placement to support the Pathway Plan.

The Needs Assessment and Pathway Plan is different from other assessments, and young people have varying views on how they would like their Pathway Plans completed. We need to help our young people to share their views, goals and aspirations in a way that suits them and their abilities. We need to ensure they understand their rights and entitlements and the choices available to them for them to make informed decisions. If the assessment identifies they do not know all or some of their rights and entitlements including how to access advocacy or make a complaint, they should be informed of this and an action in the plan to address this.

The Pathway Plan should be written in the first person – i.e., in the words of the young person. It is their plan, and the style of writing should reflect their views throughout. The assessment and pathway plan must show that we have captured the young person's voice throughout each domain.

Social Workers and Personal Advisors should ensure their assessments and pathway planning is strength based and aspirational for our young people. If a young person is struggling in any areas of independence, the assessment needs to highlight the areas of

strength and the support available to assist the young person to be able to achieve the desired outcome, rather than thinking they will always not be able to achieve this and therefore cannot live independently.

The Needs Assessment and Pathway Plan document breaks down the different domains Social Workers and Personal Advisors will need to cover with our young people. These domains are all important so we can ensure our young people have all the necessary documents and support in place. All these domains need to be acknowledged, even if there are no needs identified. This is to demonstrate they have been considered. The only exception is for Care Leavers who are 21 or over. In this case, you will be required to tick the box stating they are 21 or over and the areas they wish support to continue. The assessment will then open to these areas.

After each section of the assessment and pathway planning document there is a section that captures the Personal Advisor / Social Worker assessment and views of others supporting the young person. This should be written to the young person and respond to the young person views and include achievements, goals, concerns, worries and risks relating to that area of the assessment and planning.

The analysis section at the end of the assessment is intended for you to bring together your assessment informed by the young person's views and others. This should be written to the young person and must include worries and or concerns, and importantly their achievements, what is going well, anything that needs to happen next to assist and support them to remain safe, achieve their goals and aspirations and have suitable and affordable housing.

The new Needs Assessment and Pathway Planning has an Outcome Star included within the episode. The young person's views and scoring are what is required to inform the outcome star. Once completed, this should be uploaded, and the scoring included in the assessment and pathway planning. This should be reviewed at every review. (See guidance on completing the outcome star in Tri.x.)

It is important to ensure all Care Leavers understand their realistic housing options post 18. All Care Leavers should have their name added to a West Sussex Housing Register at the age of 16 and where applicable have a Joint Housing Pathway Planning Meeting at 17 with a West Sussex District & Borough of their choice. They should know what their move on plans are by 17 ½ years of age. Where there is uncertainty, contingency planning should be in place and agreed with the young person.

When carrying out an assessment of needs, the local authority must determine whether it would be appropriate to provide advice, assistance, and support to facilitate a Staying Put arrangement. Where they determine that it would be appropriate, and where the young person and the local authority foster parent wish to make a Staying Put arrangement, then the local authority must provide such advice, assistance, and support to facilitate a Staying Put arrangement. (Staying Put guidance can be found in Tri.x)

If you or anyone else thinks the young person may have adult care and support needs, a referral should be made to the Adult Transitional Panel at the age of 17 years of age. This is to allow time for any assessments to take place by adult services. The needs assessment and pathway planning should not assume the young person will qualify for adult accommodation and all options for accommodation prior to 18 will need to be planned for.

For Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and Young Persons, Social Workers and Personal Advisors will need to complete triple planning ensuring difficult conversations are had and planning for all eventualities, but also providing opportunities to form friendships, engage in education, their community, and where possible to work or volunteer. It is important to tailor the triple planning guidance to the young person's individual situation. (Triple planning guidance can be found in Tri.x.)

If the young person has leave to remain, the Needs Assessment and Pathway Planning will need to be completed in the standard format.

The Needs Assessment and Pathway Planning should be updated in line with the young person's changing needs and reviewed at each statutory review chaired by the young person's Conference Reviewing Officer (CRO). The timetable must take account of any forthcoming exams and avoid disrupting the young person's preparation for them. The young person must be invited to any meetings held in connection with the assessment and pathway planning.

## **5. Needs Assessment and Pathway Planning for those aged 21 and up to 25**

The government guidance, Extending Personal Adviser Support to All Care Leavers to Age 25: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities (February 2018) highlights that at this stage of their lives, young adults' needs will vary considerably. Some may need considerable continuing support with transition, whilst others will not take up the offer for continuing support. Therefore, there should be a proportionate response, with some benefitting from a continued and full assessment of needs, whilst others who seek help for specific issues have a more focussed assessment which responds to their particular needs and level of requested help.

## **6. The Needs Assessment and Pathway Plan should take account of the views of the following (where relevant to age):**

- a. The young person;
- b. The parents;
- c. The current carer;
- d. The school/college and the education service;
- e. Any Independent Visitor;
- f. Any person providing health care or treatment for the young person;
- g. The Personal Advisor;
- h. Any other relevant person including, in the case of a young person with special needs, a representative from Adult Services;

- i. A care leaver's needs in relation to their status as a victim of trafficking or an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child must be considered when the local authority is preparing an assessment of needs.
- j. Also, to require that, where a child is a victim of trafficking or an unaccompanied asylum seeking child, the local authority must consider whether their related needs are being met when reviewing the child's pathway plan. (See amended Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010).

A decision not to include significant people must be recorded in the young person's file.

Young people with particular language or communication needs should be provided throughout the process with appropriate interpretation, translation or advocacy support.

Where the young person refuses to engage in the assessment process, this should be recorded, together with any actions taken to ascertain the young person's views. All parties, including the social worker's manager and should sign the completed Needs Assessment and Pathway Plan record.

Where a young person under 18 declines to undertake the assessment process the social worker should still undertake an assessment and create a plan that provides them with details of how we can support them, what will be available for them when they turn 18, their entitlements and rights and how we will try to help them to work with us. This plan should be reviewed via the Children We Care For Review process.

The young person should be provided with a copy in a format that is accessible to him or her **within 2 weeks**. The social worker is responsible for ensuring that the outcome of the assessment is explained to the young person.

## **7.Circumstances where a Needs Assessment should be updated, and a Pathway Plan review brought forward:**

- Where a young person asks for a review of their plan;
- Where a young person has been charged with an offence, and there is a possibility of being sentenced to custody, which will risk losing suitable accommodation;
- At risk of being evicted, or threatened with homelessness;
- Where professionals are concerned about the parenting capacity of a relevant or former relevant young person, with there being a possibility that their own child may need to become the subject of a multi-agency safeguarding plan;
- In circumstances where young people move in a planned way, the review will need to decide whether it will be necessary to review the pathway plan in 3 months, or whether 6 months is more appropriate;
- Safeguarding worries including exploitation, modern slavery & risk to self or others;

If there is a change in circumstances the Needs Assessment and Pathway Planning should be updated within 28 days.



## 8. Record Keeping

Regulation 5(3) of the Care Leavers Regulations requires that the local authority keep a written record of the information obtained during an assessment; of the identity of the people whose views were sought for the purposes of the assessment; and the outcome of the assessment.

Regulation 10 establishes a duty to maintain a case record which should include any assessment of needs, any pathway plan, and any review of a pathway plan.

## Appendix 1. Needs Assessment and Pathway Plans for, Relevant and Former Relevant Young People –

Plan to include:

### 1. Health and Development

- Does the young person know how to access primary healthcare services?
- Are arrangements in place to meet the young person's medical and or dental care needs?
- Does the young person understand the actions they can take to maintain a healthy lifestyle?
- Do they know of opportunities to enjoy and achieve and take part in positive leisure activities?
- Do they need support with their mental health and or substance use?

### 2. Education, Training and Employment

- What are the young person's aspirations and career ambitions and actions and or support to achieve this?
- Does the young person know how to access careers advice?
- Education objectives and support – Does the plan continue to use the young person's Personal Education Plan?
- What are the arrangements to support the Young Person in further education and/or higher education?
- Does the young person know about apprenticeships, how to make applications to university or gain necessary qualifications?
- Are arrangements in place for work experience, career tasters or pathways into employment etc.
- Does the young person know what financial support is available to support the young person into education, training and employment?

### 3. Emotional and Behavioural Development

- Does the young person know how we can assist them to develop self-esteem and maintain positive attachments?
- Does the young person display self-esteem, resilience and confidence? What support is available to increase this for them?
- Does the young person have the capacity to form positive attachments and healthy relationships; show appropriate emotion; adapt to change, manage stress and show self-control and appropriate self-awareness.

### 4. Identity

- Are the young person's identity needs met? Including ethnicity, religious persuasion, sexual orientation?
- Does the young person understand their identity stemming from being a child in care and a care leaver?
- How the authority will assist the young person to obtain key documents linked to confirming their age and identity.

### **5. Family and Social Relationships**

- What is the assessment of the young person's relationship with their parents, wider family/friends/ community including online. Are all these relationships safe? Plan in place to address any difficulties and or increase safety.
- Any barriers to contact with family and important people and how this will be supported?
- How will their relationships contribute to the young person making a successful transition to adulthood and how they will assist with integration into the community that they identify with?
- Does the young person know what financial support is available to support contact with support networks living outside of the local authority area?

### **6. Practical and other skills necessary for independent living**

- Is the young person adequately prepared with the full range of practical skills they will need to manage their next planned move towards greater independence?
  - Is the young person adequately prepared for taking on greater levels of responsibility as they are expected to manage more independently?
- What support is required to increase their independence living skills?

### **7. Financial Arrangements**

- What is the assessment of the young person's financial needs and their capacity to manage their finances?
- Does the young person have a bank account, national insurance number, and understand the value of regular saving etc.
- Do they have access to financial support and adequate income to meet necessary expenses?
- Do they have any debts?
- Does the young person know what financial support available from the local authority and contingency planning?

### **8. (Suitability of ) Accommodation**

- What is the assessment of the quality of accommodation where the young person is living /suitability and affordability of any accommodation under consideration for them to live in.
- How far is this suitable to the full range of the young person's needs and does this meet their long-term need for stable, affordable and suitable accommodation?

- What steps might need to be taken to improve their housing options? (Schedule 2 of the Care Leavers Regulations)
- What are the young person's views on where they are living and where they want to live in the future? What are their aspirations?
- Does the young person know what is financial support available to the young person in relation to their accommodation and any moves?

## **Appendix 2 . Summary of the Pathway Planning Process**

- Ensure the young person has a clear understanding of the pathway planning process and are encouraged to fully participate and lead on their views and choices for their future.
- Agree a timetable for completion of the pathway plan at the Child Looked After Review prior to the young person's sixteenth birthday.
- Arrange a convenient time and place to meet the young person, so they feel comfortable to discuss the assessment and pathway planning with you. Discuss services /resources that can support the young person to achieve their goals and aspirations.
- Arrange pathway planning sessions with significant adults and other professionals involved with the young person and the young person should be invited to attend these.
- Although the allocated worker has the responsibility for ensuring the Needs Assessment and Pathway Plan is complete, they can negotiate with other significant people to complete relevant sections. Where agencies are contributing to the delivery of an individual young person's pathway plan, it will be good practice to ensure they have a copy of the relevant extract from the plan.
- Gather additional information from the young person's care files.
- If a young person becomes looked after following their 16th birthday, the needs assessment will be completed following thirteen weeks of being 'looked after'.
- Collate and analyse all the information gathered and complete the combined needs assessment and pathway planning by 16 years 3 months.
- Share the assessment with the young person to obtain their views in relation to the final contents of the assessment and plan. Agree who this can be shared with and gain written consent to share if this has not already been obtained.
- A copy of the pathway plan should be given to the young person, their Conference Reviewing Officer and others identified in the plan. A copy will be placed on the young person's file.

k. Assessment and pathway planning should be reviewed at least 6 monthly and early reviews convened in line with any significant changes of circumstances, safeguarding or when requested.

<b>Review / Contacts / References</b>	
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