Young People's Pathway Policy

**1. Guiding Principles**

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| **Wirral Council will act as a 'good parent' to young people leaving care for whom it has a corporate parenting responsibility. This means that young people leaving care will receive support whilst they make their transition to adulthood. The support will include assistance with securing suitable accommodation, securing employment, education or training and personal support.** |

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| 1.1 | Wirral Council's Policy reflects the principles of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 and the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers which are to improve the life chances of young people living in and leaving Local Authority care. |
| 1.2 | The Policy applies according to the definitions in the Children Act 1989 for [**Eligible**](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/eligible_young_people.html), [**Relevant**](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/relevant_young_people.html), [**Former Relevant**](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/former_relev_young_peop.html) and [**Qualifying Young People**](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/qual_young_people.html) and includes in certain circumstances young people who are subject to [**Special Guardianship Orders**](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/special_guardianship_order.html) and were looked after immediately before the order (see [**Appendix 1: Categories of Young People**](https://wirralchildcare.proceduresonline.com/p_yp_pathways.html#app1)). |
| 1.3 | Young people within the care of Wirral Council are not expected to leave care until they are demonstrably prepared and ready to do so. |
| 1.4 | Services provided will start from the needs of the young person leaving care and will provide support that reflects their social, educational and accommodation needs. |
| 1.5 | Support will continue to be offered to young people after they cease to be looked after according to the legal definitions (see [**Appendix 1: Categories of Young People**](https://wirralchildcare.proceduresonline.com/p_yp_pathways.html#app1)). |
| 1.6 | All preparation for leaving care and provision of after care services will take account of the young person's gender, religion, racial origin, cultural and linguistic background, sexual orientation and any needs arising from then having a disability. |
| 1.7 | Young people who are also parents will have services offered to them as care leavers in their own right, as well as any support or interventions related to their children which would be delivered via the area or district teams. |
| 1.8 | Young people leaving care with complex needs who receive a service from the Children with Disabilities Team will continue to receive a service from this team in conjunction with the Pathway Team.  |
| 1.9 | Young people leaving the care of Wirral Council will be offered the same degree of support as that which would be offered by any good parent who continues to support their children into adulthood.  |

**2. Care Planning**

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| **Wirral Council will ensure that all young people looked after away from home will benefit from a culture that promotes preparation and planning for them moving into independent living.** |

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| 2.1 | A one plan approach has been adopted to allow the looked after Care Plan to remain in place when a care leaver transfers to the Pathway Team. Once the [**Pathway Plan**](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/pathway_plan.html) is endorsed at [**Child Looked After Review**](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/looked_aft_review.html) the Pathway Plan will become "The Plan". |
| 2.2 | Preparation and planning for leaving care will be achieved through the child looked after's statutory review process. All young people remaining in the care of Wirral Council until the age of 18 will continue to be allocated a Social Worker who will be responsible for the implementation of the Plan. |
| 2.3 | The decision around a young person formally leaving care will be made at a CLA Review. If a regulated placement ends but a young person is assessed as continuing to need support as a Looked After young person, then the CLA status may continue as an 'other arrangement'. |
| 2.4 | From the age of 16 all young people leaving the care of Wirral Council who are defined as eligible or relevant under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 will benefit from a Pathway Plan which incorporates the young person's [**Care Plan**](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/care_plan.html) into one plan. This plan will outline support until the young person is 21, or 25 if the young person requests continued support. |
| 2.5 | The Pathway Plan will be delivered by a social worker (young people aged 16-17) and a Personal advisor from the Leaving Care Team (young people aged 18-21). |
| 2.6 | The Pathway Plan will be reviewed as a minimum every 6 months or following a significant event or change of circumstances. |
| 2.7 | Wirral Council are committed to ensuring that young people are actively involved in drafting and reviewing their own Pathway Plans. In addition, Wirral Council is committed to ensure that young people leaving care are actively involved in developing new services. |
| 2.8 | Wirral will assess those young people who have formerly been in care who have become subject to Special Guardianship Orders on reaching 16 to see what assistance can be given to them as [**Qualifying Young People**](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/qual_young_people.html). If requested by the Young Person. |

**3. Employment, Education and Training**

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| **The preparation and planning around employment, education and training for young people leaving care will reflect both their aspirations and ability. It is intended that through support around employment, education and training young people leaving care will benefit from increased opportunities in adulthood.** |

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| 3.1 | Prior to a young person leaving care their [**Personal Education Plan**](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/pers_education_plan.html) (PEP) should reflect their aspirations and abilities. |
| 3.2 | Once a young person has left care the PEP will inform the [**Pathway Plan**](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/pathway_plan.html) which will highlight opportunities for employment, education and training.  |
| 3.3 | Young people leaving care will be fully involved in discussions and plans for their future employment, education and training and be given advice and information that will enable them to make informed choices. |
| 3.4 | Wirral Council will work across service areas and with other organisations such as Connexions and the Jobcentre to ensure that children in care and care leavers aged 16 to 21 are engaged in education, training and employment. An Employability Operations Group that involves Children's Specialist Services, the 14-19 Team, Connexions and others will meet regularly to promote opportunities for individual young people. A joint protocol between Wirral Pathways Team, Jobcentre and the Benefit Delivery Centres ensures young people leaving care are able to access benefits on their 18th birthday by processing their claim before their 18th birthday and job opportunities are maximised. |
|   | Employment |
| 3.5 | Wirral Council will improve the opportunity for young people leaving care to enter employment by providing work experience placements and by supporting young people leaving care into employment of their choice. |
| 3.6 | Young people leaving care will benefit from advice and support around seeking and sustaining employment from both their personal advisor and through our partnership with Connexions and the 14-19 Team. |
| 3.7 | Wirral Council will work with Partner Agencies with the aim of securing employment opportunities for young people leaving care. |
|   | Education and Training |
| 3.8 | Wirral Council will endeavour to ensure that young people leaving care have stable placements that are supportive of their studies, including post 18. |
| 3.9 | Wirral Council will provide financial assistance to relevant young people for education or training related expenses as outlined in the” Leaving Care Financial Policy” where they are not eligible for other financial support. |
| 3.10 | Former relevant young people aged 19 plus in full time further education are not entitled to benefits In these circumstances young people may receive financial assistance from Wirral Council as outlined in the Leaving Care Financial Policy. |
| 3.11 | Wirral Council will encourage wider participation of young people leaving care in higher education. Young people leaving care will receive support by or arranged through their personal advisor in completing application forms for higher education and in applying for a student grant, loan and additional support through charitable trusts. |
| 3.12 | Wirral Council will ensure that an assessment is undertaken of the personal circumstances of a former relevant young person leaving care and former children looked after that are subject to [**Special Guardianship Orders**](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/special_guardianship_order.html) to ensure they have the means to complete higher education studies. Former relevant young people leaving care will be provided with a bursary of £2,000 during the duration of their Higher Education Course. |

**4. Accommodation**

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| **All young people leaving care will be supported to live in suitable accommodation based on assessed need. Support will continue to be available to prevent young people leaving care becoming homeless.** |

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| 4.1 | Wirral Council will continue to develop and have available a wide range of accommodation to meet the needs of young people leaving care aged 16-17 years. In addition, Wirral Council will support young people leaving care aged 18-21 years to live in their own safe affordable accommodation and where appropriate to remain with their Foster Carers. This will involve Wirral Council working in partnership with a range of social housing providers, registered landlords, supported housing providers in the private sector and Foster Carers. |
| 4.2 | Wirral Council is committed to providing a variety of models of supported housing for young people leaving care. It is recognised that one model does not meet the needs of all young people. |
| 4.3 | Wirral Council enables young people completing A level studies (or equivalent) to remain in their foster placements beyond their eighteenth birthday until the completion of their course. The Head of Specialist Services has the discretion to agree to young people remaining in Local Authority foster care after their 18th birthday where they are clearly engaged in education, employment or training opportunities for a specified time limited period. In any other cases the matter will require a decision under 'Delegated Authority' by the Lead Member for Children and Lifelong Learning. |
| 4.4 | When developing accommodation for young people leaving care Wirral Council will ensure the suitability and security of accommodation with its providers and will ensure that young people leaving care are not placed alongside people who are potentially unsafe. |
| 4.5 | When providing accommodation to young people leaving care Wirral Council will ensure that there are staged moves to independent accommodation with the ability to fall back on more supportive accommodation arrangements should this prove necessary. An “Independence” course is provided to assist young people leaving care develop their practical skills prior to them living independently. |
| 4.6 | Wirral Council will work closely with young people leaving care and housing providers to avoid eviction and homelessness. |
| 4.7 | For young people leaving care not in full time employment who cannot access housing benefit the cost of rent/lease of accommodation will be met in full with a clear plan for employment in association with the 'Job Centre' according to the joint protocol. |
| 4.8 | In addition to the above the reasonable cost of furnishing the accommodation to ensure sleep, warmth, preparation of food, care of clothing and personal safety will be met via the Access to First Home Grant. The First Home Grant has been raised to £3000 from the 1.4.2023. |
| 4.9 | When the young person leaving care is ready for independent living then financial assistance in the form of the first home grant will be paid. This grant is for the purpose of assistance a young person to both secure and furnish independent accommodation. |
| 4.10 | Young people leaving care, including former children looked after that are subject to Special Guardianship Orders, who are accessing higher education will be eligible to apply for a student grant and loan to support their accommodation needs, and where necessary additional support can be provided (see Leaving Care Financial Policy). Wirral Council will ensure that former relevant care leavers are also supported with their accommodation during vacations. |

**5. Personal Support**

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| **As young people leaving care have less family support and move to independence earlier than other young people, Wirral Council recognises the need to provide additional support to such young people to enable them to develop to adulthood.** |

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| 5.1 | Young people leaving care aged 16 and above will be able to access support from the Pathway team. Eligible, relevant, and former relevant young people leaving care post 16 will have a designated pathway worker regardless of whether they continue to remain looked after or not. This will ensure that young people leaving care have access to the support and advice they require to meet their needs. |
|   | Practical Living Skills |
| 5.2 | All young people will receive support both before and after leaving care in relation to practical independence skills such as cooking, budgeting, and driving. |
| 5.3 | This support may be delivered by the personal advisor or through 'drop in' facilities linked to accommodation projects. |
|   | Health |
| 5.4 | Wirral Council will work in partnership with the named nurses for children in care to ensure that eligible young people leaving care understand their health needs and how to meet them. The named nurses may act as the lead health professionals for those eligible young people leaving care who are not registered with a GP or school nurse. |
| 5.5 | Wirral Council will ensure that all young people leaving care are enabled to register with a GP and Dentist. |
|   | Leisure and Culture |
| 5.6 | Wirral Council Provide Free access to council Leisure centres for all Eligible, Relevant and Former Relevant young people who request this. |
| 5.7 | The importance of developing/maintaining hobbies and interests will be considered within the pathway plan. Pathway workers will be able to assist young people in accessing any financial resources relevant to their hobbies/interests. |
|   | Financial Support |
| 5.8 | Young people leaving care will benefit from advice and support on budgeting and managing their own finances. |
| 5.9 | This will also include practical support around opening a bank account. |
| 5.10 | The Pathway Team has a duty to provide financial support in the form of a weekly allowance to relevant young people leaving care who are not in education, employment, or training. |
| 5.11 | Incentives may also be paid to former relevant young people leaving care who are in training/further education. Former relevant young people leaving care who cooperate with their pathway plan may also benefit from incentives paid at Birthdays and Christmas. Full details of the financial support/incentives available may be found in the Leaving Care Financial Policy. |

**6. Reviewing the Policy**

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| 6.1 | It is intended that this Policy should be reviewed every three years. |
| 6.2 | The review will be undertaken in consultation with young people who are looked after or who have been previously looked after by Wirral Council. |

**Appendix 1: Definitions**

Within the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 the following categories of young people are eligible for leaving care support:

* **Eligible** - those 16- and 17-year-olds who have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and remain Looked After.
* **Relevant** - those 16- and 17-year-olds who have been Looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and have left care.
* **Former Relevant** - those 18–21-year-olds who have been eligible or relevant, or both.
* Also, young people who are under 25 and have requested ongoing support.

The Local Authority must keep in touch, assess their needs, keep the Pathway Plan under regular review, provide financial assistance and appoint a personal advisor for eligible, relevant and former relevant young people.

* **Qualifying** - those young people who are:
	+ Aged 16 to 21 (or 25 if in education and training) who ceased to be looked after the age of 16 and who have not been looked after for thirteen weeks since their 14th birthday;
	+ Young people aged 16 to 21 who are subject to a Special Guardianship Order and were looked after immediately before making of the Special Guardianship Order. Those who are 18 years and above must have had a Special Guardianship Order in place when they reached 18.
	+ Young disabled people who have been privately fostered after reaching 16.

Qualifying young people are entitled to receive advice and assistance (including in exceptional circumstances , financial assistance) from the Pathway Team if they request this, however they are not entitled to an allocated [**Personal Advisor**](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/personal_adviser.html) or a [**Pathway Plan**](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/pathway_plan.html).

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