

Next Step Leaving Care Policy

Revised March 2022

1. Leaving Care Policy

1.1 Our Principles

The Children's Services Directorate is committed to improving the life chances of young people living in and leaving care.

We embrace the spirit of The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and the challenges set through Performance Indicator targets because we believe young people leaving care and entering adulthood should not be isolated but should participate socially and economically as citizens of Salford. We also aim to deliver on the principles and requirements set out in the Children and Social Care Act 2017. This is especially in relation to the Local Offer and further arrangements for continuing support for care leavers, particularly those with unmet needs, beyond their 21st birthday. Furthermore, we will be guided by all aspects of the national Care Leaver Charter.

We are committed to working with other Directorates and agencies to ensure effective planning, resourcing, implementation and review of leaving care services (this includes the development of the Greater Manchester Care Leaver Covenant). Planning for the improvement of services in Salford will be documented in the Care Leaver Strategy and the Corporate Parenting Strategy, along with their accompanying action plans. Services will be delivered which are anti-discriminatory and sensitive to the needs of care leavers and their families. Feedback from services users will be a crucial element of this process.

The Children's Services Directorate will act as any 'good parent', having high expectations and aspirations and ensuring that:

- Young people have their basic needs met such as nutrition, housing, health care;
- They have access to education, leisure and cultural activities;
- They are encouraged into employment or on to higher education.

We believe that:

- Young people should not be discharged from care until they are prepared and ready to leave;
- Young people should participate in assessment, preparation and planning, enabling them to leave care successfully;
- Personal support should be available to young people after leaving care;
- Financial support should be tailored to the individual care leaver.

We accept that some young people will challenge the service and reject the support offered. Services to such young people will need to be delivered

creatively. However, if a young person is not ready to be helped, they need to understand that they may return for support at a later date.

Young people in and leaving care are not a homogenous group and require services which respect and address individual need. It is also recognised that within the care population, as in broader society, certain groups experience discrimination due to gender, race, ethnicity, culture, sexuality and impairment. This will be recognised when developing both services and individual packages of care. In particular, we recognise certain groups are likely to require additional support

- those young people in the criminal justice system, including those remanded into care;
- care leavers who are parents, or about to become parents;
- black young people leaving the care system;
- unaccompanied asylum seeking young people;
- Young people with disabilities or impairments.
- gay and lesbian young people

Care leavers from these groups as well as the general leaving care population will be involved in all planning, monitoring and evaluation of services and the outcomes for young people.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The Leaving Care Service is fully committed to the principles of the Leaving Care Act and will pursue the aims and objectives outlined below:

- provide stable placements, continuity of carers and the maintenance, wherever possible, of positive links whilst young people are 'looked after';
- 'look after' young people until they are prepared and ready to leave care;
- promote and maintain relationships with carers and families, where possible, after young people leave care;
- prepare young people gradually to be ready to leave care, paying attention to practical skills required for independent living - self-care needs – health, budgeting, domestic skills – and personal and relationship dimensions;
- maximise the education, training and employment outcomes for young people leaving care;
- ensure young people leaving care have access to a range of accommodation and the support and skills to maintain themselves in their accommodation;

- provide or enable ongoing personal support;
- where young people leaving care are entitled to claim welfare benefits, ensure that they receive their full entitlements;
- involve young people in all assessment, planning, review and decision-making arrangements for leaving care;
- inform young people leaving care of the available services – including the provision of accessible leaving care guides;
- Monitor and evaluate the outcomes of our aims and objectives.

The Legal Framework/Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

The Children Leaving Care Act 2000 is intended to help those children and young people who depend on the Local Authority in place of family. The provisions of the Legislation are modelled on what good parents would normally expect to provide for their children.

Eligible children:

- Children aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who are still looked after.

Relevant children:

- Children aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who have left care.

Former relevant children:

- Young people aged 18-21 who have been either **eligible** or **relevant children**, or both. If at the age of 21 the young person is still being helped by his responsible authority with education, he remains a **former relevant child** to the end of the agreed programme of education even if that takes him past the age of 21.

Qualifying children and young people over 16

- Section 24(1): Any young person aged 21 (under 24 if in education or training) who cease to be looked after or accommodated in a variety of other settings, or privately fostered, after the age of 16.

In relation to these young people, the Local Authority has a duty to:

- Advise, befriend and give assistance.
- Carry out an assessment of the needs to determine what assistance (if any) it would be appropriate to provide.

Extension to 25 years old

- If you are under 25 years old and previously open to the leaving care team, under the Children and Social Work Act 2017 you are entitled to return for support, particularly if there is an unmet need.

The responsible authority

- Section 23A (4): The council which last looked after the child or young person.

1.3 Working in Partnership

A key aspect of the delivery of leaving care services in Salford (which was first established in 1986), is our belief that the service aims to provide a solid, reliable and innovative provision for young people who have been looked after in Salford.

We believe that joint working is the key to a successful service, and we will continue to work collaboratively with other divisions and directorates of the city council as well as other agencies.

The Children Leaving Care Act 2000 places a corporate duty on Local Authorities to provide services for care leavers. There are already well-established procedures in place with other agencies, for example, Housing providers, Probation, Drug and Alcohol services, Universities, Teenage Pregnancy Team, DWP and Connexions. It is our intention to strengthen our other relationships and to develop new partnerships to ensure that a comprehensive service is in place.

Where appropriate we will use the opportunities available to the City Council, to seek additional funding to enhance the established service.

We believe in the concept of Corporate Parenting and will continually strive to keep this high on the agenda for improving life opportunities for care leavers.

2. Planning for Young People

It is important that young people are helped to prepare and plan for their future to enable them to achieve their aspirations. We will make sure that all young people in care have a pathway plan by sixteen years and three months. This plan will map out a clear pathway to independence, set out the support and assistance the young person will receive and who will deliver each component, with approximate dates. We expect that in most cases there will be a reduction in support over the life of the plan as the young person moves to independence, but we recognise that this will not apply in all cases. The plans will cover the period from 16 until independence is achieved and look beyond 18. Plans will apply both to those who remain in care up to 18 and those who leave care before 18. These plans will not be about planning to move young people out of care but about enabling young people to plan for their futures and helping them to achieve their potential.

It is important that young people have certainty about their future. However, in completing the plans we will need to be sensitive to other events in the young person's life; planning should be seen as a process rather than an event. It would not be sensible, for example, to discuss the plan in detail with a young person in the lead-up to their GCSE exams. However, it is most important that workers and young people discuss the plan within the timescales laid down by the Act and look to revisit the plan in detail once the examinations have been completed.

2.1 The Content of the Pathway Plan

Young people have very differing needs. Each pathway plan will vary according to the young person's needs. We would anticipate that in all plans the following would be covered, using the DOH Pathway Plan and signs of safety theme:

- personal support e.g. advice, befriending, mentoring
- accommodation
- education and training
- employment
- health care
- life skills
- financial support

2.2 Drawing up the plans

To ensure that pathway plans accurately reflect a young person's needs it is important that all relevant people are consulted in the planning. It is important to stress that the young person is integral to the plan and should be both involved and listened to when discussing their wishes for the future. We propose that the plan should be drawn up by the young person's Pathway Adviser on the basis of a thorough multi-agency assessment of need. We expect a wide range of people to be consulted including:

- the young person
- foster carers or residential carers
- Accommodation providers
- the local Learning Partnership, including education and Connexions
- health professionals

We will involve the young person's immediate and extended family where this is appropriate.

For young people with special educational needs the pathway plan will be consistent with their special educational needs transition plan.

Review of Pathway Plans

Young people experience a great deal of change in circumstances and ambitions between the ages of 16 and 18, pathway plans should be flexible enough to reflect this. We will review the plans regularly, at a minimum of 6 monthly intervals or more often if there is a need. The reviews of the pathway plans will involve the Pathway Adviser, the young person and other interested people.

The meeting to review the plan will be chaired by an independent Reviewing Officer and after 18 years the 18+ Relevant and Former Pathway Plan Review Officer.

Reviews of Pathway Plans for those aged 18 and over should also be carried out at a minimum of 6 monthly intervals. In planning for the future young people do not always agree with the plans that are made. When a young person and their Adviser cannot agree a pathway plan, we expect that informal negotiation will take place supported by the Next Step Practice Manager and the Salford independent Advocacy service (Barnardo's).

Pathway Adviser

We believe that it is essential that young people receive the support and assistance they need in a co-ordinated and easily accessible way. To achieve this every 16 and 17-year-old that is in care or has left care will have a designated Pathway Adviser. The Pathway Adviser as well as carrying out the responsibilities and duties of the Children Leaving Care Act will also work within the statutory duties of the Children Act and be responsible, as the allocated worker, for carrying out all the duties for Looked After children on their caseload.

The team of Pathway Advisers will be managed by a Salford Practice Manager.

Aftercare Worker

The Aftercare Worker will work with young people, carrying out the duties and responsibilities laid down within the Children Leaving Care Act 2000.

The Aftercare workers will be managed by a Salford Practice Manager.

The Aftercare worker will work with young people aged 18-21 (up to their 25th birthday if remaining open to the service) and assumes casework responsibility at an agreed point in time after discussions between the Salford Practice Managers.

The Role of the Pathway Adviser/Aftercare Worker

The workers will have three key roles:

- **Single focus for support**

The worker will act as a single point of contact for the young person. They will provide general support and advice by contacting the young person on a regular basis. They will be easily contactable when the young person needs advice, particularly in times of crisis. The worker would also be able to put the young person in contact with the relevant people or agencies for more specialised support.

- **Case work responsibility**

The worker will be responsible for negotiating resources to meet the young person's needs as defined by the pathway plan. This would include being responsible for all financial arrangements that involve the young person.

- **Co-ordinator of services**

The worker will work closely with other agencies to co-ordinate the provision of services to the young person and develop links with a named person in all relevant agencies, including:

- Connexions
- School/College
- accommodation providers
- local health services
- training organisations
- Greater Manchester Youth Network (GMYN)

And, where appropriate:

- prison and probation service
- Youth Justice Service
- Department for Work and Pensions.
- Drug and Alcohol Service
- Teenage Pregnancy Team

The workers will work with their named contacts in other agencies to ensure that every young person receives co-ordinated services. This will include sharing information about the young person, with their consent.

Supported Lodgings

Next Step provides a supported Lodgings scheme for care leavers in Salford. This service is available to 16- to 24-year-old care leavers.

Next Step recruits and assesses lodgings providers. The providers are formally approved by the Supported Lodgings Panel.

A team of workers offer support and training to the providers around the needs of care leavers.

Supported Lodgings is a unique service which offers care leavers the opportunity to live semi-independently ahead of moving into their own accommodation.

Supported Lodgings however should not be seen purely in this context and can be accessed for young people who have lived independently, but for a variety of reasons feel they need a higher level of support.

Supported Tenancies

Salford SHOP (Salford Housing Options Point) provides a supported tenancy scheme for care leavers aged 16-24.

The service offers practical support to young people moving into their own accommodation within Salford, including support with housing benefits, council tax, utility supplies and billing, as well as positive reinforcement and acknowledgement of the difficulties young people experience when first embarking on independent living.

The service is also available to young people who may have encountered difficulties with their tenancies long after their initial move into independence and require support to resolve these issues.

Substance Misuse

It is widely accepted that care leavers are vulnerable to becoming involved in substance misuse.

Salford City Council, in conjunction with Salford drug services provide access for LAC and care leavers to a substance misuse worker (Tier 3 service) through Early Break. Their workers actively seek to engage young people involved in or at risk of substance misuse and offers practical support and advice around the dangers of substance misuse, as well as providing written information about different types and categories of drugs.

Accommodation

The Children's Services Directorate will work closely with the Housing Directorate and other accommodation providers, to ensure that there is a range of safe and affordable accommodation options to meet the needs of the care leavers.

- Young people need suitable accommodation. There are a wide variety of places where young people live. They include foster homes, residential homes, accommodation with associated support and training opportunities e.g. foyers, supported lodgings, house shares with other care leavers and non-care leavers, and their own flats. Different settings have very varying costs.
- Decisions about placements are not driven by financial considerations but clearly when planning with a young person we need to take cost into account and be realistic. We are working to ensure a range of suitable accommodation to meet the needs of young people is available.

We will make a commitment to:

- Avoid moving young people who are settled unless it is unavoidable or offers clear advantages.
- Assess young people's needs and prepare them for a move.
- Where practicable, offer a choice in the type and location of accommodation.
- Set up a package of support to go with the accommodation.
- Have a clear financial plan for the accommodation. Have a contingency plan in case the proposed accommodation breaks down.

When discussing accommodation, consideration will be given to a young persons'

- Pre care experience
- Care experience
- Family contact
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Sexuality
- Disability
- How well prepared a young person is to leave care.

The needs assessment will have identified what specific assistance a young person will require in relation to accommodation and what types of accommodation are suitable to meet the young persons' needs.

Education and Training

Pathway planning for care leavers will build upon the foundation of the educational progress made while the young people were looked after. It will need to take account of the young person's Personal Education Plan.

The Pathway Plan will reflect the needs and potential of each individual which will be identified through the needs assessment. Pathway Advisers will try to ensure that the young person is in a stable placement – or, if they have left care, in stable accommodation – in order to enable them to make the most of educational opportunities. The Adviser will be involved in monitoring educational progress with a view both to encouraging young people and to be ready to intervene to resolve any problems which arise. This will include keeping in contact with the school, college or university (in some instances we recognise that young people may not wish their worker to be overly involved with their college experiences and this would have to be negotiated with the young person) and attending parents' events and consultations with the young person.

Some young people may need special help or encouragement with education. When young people have left school without qualifications, we will give practical emotional and financial support if they wish in the future to go to college or attend training courses, including 1:1 teaching around literacy and numeracy.

Employment

The Pathway Plan will set out how we will assist young people in employment or seeking employment. Pathway planning for employment will be assisted by a strong emphasis on the importance of education and training. We will also gather information about a young person's achievements and potential; carry out an assessment of young people's capabilities as far as employment is concerned; identifying what work needs to be done to increase a young person's employability; exploring and opening up employment opportunities for young people; developing links with local employers; and identifying the different sources of support for young people.

The leaving care service will continue to look for opportunities for employment within the City Council and look to pursue the issue of Corporate Parenting. All young people will have access to the Corporate Parenting Officer and/or a Connexions adviser who will assist in identifying employment opportunities.

Health and Leisure

The Pathway Plan will seek to identify and meet the health and leisure needs of the young people we work with. In doing this we recognise that evidence shows that looked after children have greater levels of health needs than others.

The Health Coordinator for Looked After Children will play an integral part in the planning of a young person's health needs.

Through undertaking holistic health assessments, including regard to past health records, Pathway Plans will strive to:

Promote a healthy lifestyle

Ensure appropriate use of primary health care services and specialist health and therapeutic services, including entitlement to free and subsidised services

Promote leisure interests and access to a free gym pass

Provide quality information to young people on appropriate health issues, including sexual health, sexuality and mental health

Help young people take responsibility for their own health care

Address the specific needs of young disabled people and those from minority ethnic communities.

Financial Support for Young People Who Have Been Looked After

We are committed to ensuring that young people should be able to maximise the opportunities available to them. We will set out our policy in such a way that it is flexible enough to meet the diverse needs of young people in Salford

These arrangements outline the financial support for young people who have been looked after or accommodated by Salford.

- We believe that no young person should receive a package of financial support that would be less than he/she would have received if eligible for state benefits.
- We will endeavour to ensure that young people are no worse off than their peers.

A [written financial policy](#) will be available to all young people involved with Next Step in a separate format.

- Our aim is to assist young people to become financially independent. To this end increasing levels of responsibility for managing finances will be agreed with young people as part of their pathway plan.
 - We believe that every young person should hold a bank account. It is expected that the majority of funding will be paid directly into these accounts.

What Can Be Considered Under These Arrangements?

Standard Items

Accommodation
Provisions
Clothing
Travel
Fuel, (heating etc)
Education/Training (fees and equipment)
TV Licence
Setting up home costs
Health care (glasses, prescriptions)
Costs associated with special needs
Cultural and religious needs
Hobbies and holidays
Counselling or therapeutic needs
Contact with family or other
Significant relationships

Additional Items (Discretionary)

Childcare
Treats and special occasions

It is expected that finance will be used appropriately and therefore there is a comprehensive list of standard items that each young person should have. This level of expenditure will be agreed as part of the pathway planning process.

In addition, there will be other requirements according to the individual needs of young people. These will have been identified as part of a needs assessment drawn up by a young person and his Pathway Advisor.

Finance

The basic amount that young people should receive is laid out below.

An education bursary is available to young people attending further education. The current rate is £35 and may, dependent upon area of residence, be distributed in different forms (bus passes and money). We believe that this is an incentive that should be encouraged but we recognise that this may lead to

some young people in education being better off than those who are working. To help in overcoming this we will ensure that each young person who is engaged in an appropriate education, employment or training activity (and no entitlement to a bursary) will receive an incentive bonus depending on their age.

- Up to and including 18-year-olds – up to £30 per week (£6 per day)
- 19-year-olds – up to £20 per week (£4 per day)
- 20-year-olds & over – up to £15 per week (£3 per day)

There is an income cap of £150 per week for all those aged under 25 years.

All young people who qualify will be expected to sign an incentive agreement.

Eligible young person aged 16 or 17 in residential or foster care

In the majority of cases **eligible** young people will still be looked after either in foster care or residential care. These young people will have their finances provided to them by their carers.

If the young person is in education, they are entitled to claim the education bursary and this allowance should not be taken into consideration or affect their entitlements from their carers. If the young person is in employment or training the incentive scheme (as above) will apply and subject to signing an incentive agreement with their worker.

Eligible young people living in other forms of accommodation in the community

A minority of young people may still be **eligible** young people, i.e. on Care Orders but living in the community. These young people will currently receive £58.90 per week and the bursary if in full time education or an incentive bonus from the leaving care team if in training or employment, subject to signing an incentive agreement with their worker.

We recognise that there are many different types of accommodation in the community, with differing financial responsibilities for young people, e.g. responsibilities for fuel payments, food, T.V. license, laundry etc. Some accommodation provides a range of services contained within the rent charge others charge a small service charge, others such as your own tenancy, provides only the accommodation.

With these anomalies in mind, and recognising that £58.90, the equivalent to the state benefit, is a minimum requirement, monies will be set aside on a weekly basis for these young people and saved for times when they need additional financial support, e.g. clothing, leisure activities or other appropriate expenditure. These savings will be administered by the worker and finance officer.

The accommodation costs for all of this group, who are not entitled to housing benefit, will be paid for in full by Next Step

Relevant Young People Aged 16 Or 17

Relevant young people will receive the same level of financial support as **eligible young people living in other forms of accommodation in the city** (please see above)

Former Relevant Young People Aged 18-25

It is expected that when young people reach 18 they should assume financial responsibility for themselves. However, it is recognised that the transition from financial dependency on Next Step to that of the DWP or waged employment can be daunting, and young people will be supported and advised throughout this process.

In addition, Care leavers will be supported to claim Council Tax exemption (if this is available in the local authority in which they reside).

Those young people in further education will be assisted in claiming the appropriate state benefits to cover their weekly living expenses and accommodation costs, as well as continuing to claim the bursary.

Where college students face additional expenses for equipment, books, trips etc. Next Step will provide help in sourcing funds to pay for these.

Those young people on training schemes will be advised and assisted to claim Universal Credit and/or other state benefits to cover their accommodation costs. The incentive bonus will continue to be available. Any personal protective equipment required for training will be paid for by Next Step where no other financial support is available to pay for these.

Those young people in paid employment will be advised and supported to claim Universal Credit and/or other state benefits, where applicable. The incentive bonus will continue to be available for young people allocated to a Next Step worker up to the age of 25 years.

Those young people not in employment, education or training will be advised and assisted to claim the appropriate benefits to their individual circumstances.

Throughout the period that a young person is not in purposeful activity, they will be actively encouraged and supported to look at obstacles or barriers preventing them from accessing education, training or employment.

Young mums, young mums to be or young people with disabilities will receive additional specialist support to assist them in these areas.

Setting Up Home Allowance

All care leavers when setting up home for the first time are entitled to financial support from Next Step.

It is recognised that some young people achieve independence in stages, perhaps first living in supported accommodation before moving-on to full independence. Whatever the needs are, whether it is a television and a set of pans for a bedroom or furnishing a whole house/flat, the grant will go some way to setting-up young people and can be claimed in whole or in part up to the age of 21 (or 25 if the young person has an allocated Next Step worker).

The grant is currently £2000 for a single person and an additional £400 for young people with dependents.

For those entitled to claim a discretionary grant, practise should be that the Leaving Care Grant supplements the discretionary grant.

Complaints

The duty to provide a procedure for registering complaints and representations is covered by S.26 of the children act 1989 and the Representations Procedure (Children) Regulations 1991. For the purpose of this policy these procedures apply to the following young people:

- Eligible children
- Relevant children
- Former Relevant children
- Qualifying children.

In addition the Children (Leaving Care) Act places a new duty on local authorities to provide an initial 14-day informal-resolution stage in the complaints procedure. The 14-day period begins when the local authority receives the complaint. A written summary of the complaint must be sent to the authority's designated complaint officer. Every effort must be made to reach a settlement with which the young person is satisfied. If this is not possible the designated officer must be informed, and the young person advised of his/her right to begin the formal complaints process.

The informal stage of the procedure may not apply if the complaint hinges on the level or provision of maintenance. Under these circumstances the responsible authority must move straight into the full complaints procedure.

We will attempt to resolve any complaint as quickly as possible. In the first instance we believe that it would be most appropriate for a young person to deal with any complaint by discussion with their Pathway Adviser. If this is unsuccessful or the young person feels that their advisor is not the most appropriate person, then they should contact the Practice Manager or Service Manager.

We will encourage young people to use this method although we recognise that they may prefer to have someone to act on their behalf and therefore every young person will be made aware of the role of the Children Society independent advocacy service.

Salford City Council have well established complaints procedures. All young people should be made aware of these by their adviser. They should be given individual information and their attention should be drawn to other materials available in the service.

Phil Varghese

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