

Leaving and After Care Policy

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1. Mission statement

Our vision is to achieve the best possible outcome for you as a care leaver. We will do this by accepting you for who you are and by helping and supporting you to achieve your aims and goals in life without judging you and by understanding and respecting your rights as an individual.

2. Legal definitions

Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 created three categories of looked after young people and care leavers who are entitled to support from the Local Authority after their 16th birthday.

Eligible child

Aged 16 or 17 and currently looked after, either on a Care Order (Sec 31 of the Children Act 1989) or accommodated under Sec 20 of Children Act 1989. To be 'Eligible' the young person must have been looked after for a period or periods totalling at least 13 weeks since their 14th birthday. A child is also 'Eligible' if, having been looked after for 3 months or more, they are then detained after their 16th birthday either in Hospital, Remand Centre, Young Offender's Institution or a Secure Training Centre.

Relevant child

Aged 16 or 17 and have left care, having previously been in the category of 'Eligible Child'. If a person leaves care and returns home for a period of 6 months to be cared for by anybody with parental responsibility for them, they cease to be a 'Relevant Child', and become entitled to services under Section 24 of the Children Act 1989.

Former relevant child

Aged 18-21 (or 25 if in full time further or higher education), and have left care having been previously either 'Eligible', 'Relevant' or both.

3. Context and contacts

The Leaving and After Care Service is part of the Essex County Council, Schools, Children and Families Directorate.

The service is operated from four team bases across the county of Essex. Management and support Employees are also based at County Hall in Chelmsford.

Leaving & After Care North
1 Beverley Road
Colchester
Essex CO3 3NG
Tel: 01206 768067

Leaving & After Care Mid
66-68 Duke Street
Chelmsford
Essex CM1 1YS
Tel: 01245 431545

Leaving & After Care South
34 The Square
Rochford
Essex SS4 1AJ
Tel: 01702 544458

Leaving & After Care West
9 Peterswood
Harlow
Essex CM18 7RJ
Tel: 01279 426700

Leaving & After Care
EUG1, County Hall
Market Road
Chelmsford
Essex CM1 1QH
Tel: 0845 603 7627

The team offices are open between 9am and 5.30pm, Monday to Thursday, and between 9am and 4.30pm on Fridays. They are closed on public bank holidays. Evening 'Drop-in' facilities are available at each office on set days and other out of hours activities and meetings are arranged for young people on a regular basis. For more information about these please contact the individual team offices.

For emergencies that occur outside of the office opening hours an Emergency Duty Service is available. They can be contacted by telephone on 0845 606 1212.

4. Corporate parent

We act as a corporate parent to young people who we deliver a service to.

Being a corporate parent means that we provide support and practical advice and assistance to young people as would be expected of a good parent.

What we do:

We have a corporate parenting policy and strategy, including our pledge to young people. Corporate parenting is included in the Children and Young People's Plan. This policy lays out a strategy for assessing and meeting young people's accommodation, social, emotional, employment, health and educational support needs and identifies the partner organisations and individuals with whom the plan will be implemented, including young people themselves, paying due regard to the need for confidential information sharing.

Our service promotes continuity and stability in terms of the care and support our young people receive.

We keep in touch with all Eligible, Relevant, Former Relevant and qualifying young people, providing regular contact and practical and financial support as appropriate to individual needs and preferences.

All young people have a named lead professional to be their principal supporter and advocate and we ensure that the young person has an adequate network of support.

Employees and carers are trained, qualified and supported to undertake their roles as corporate parents, including their responsibilities to prepare young people for adult life.

5. Be healthy

We want our young people to be healthy.

This means that every young person is entitled to good health care and to receive information and support to maintain a healthy lifestyle, which respects their right to confidentiality.

What we do to achieve this:

Every six months as part of young people's needs assessments, pathway plans and review processes we assess physical and emotional health needs and how these needs will be met.

Each young person is given clear information and advice about their health, healthy lifestyles and sexual health, and also information about local health services. All of our looked after young people and workers have access to advice from the dedicated Essex Looked After Children's Nurse. In addition all children and young people looked after are encouraged to have an annual health check.

We make sure that our health advice and information is put in a way young people can understand and also protects their right to confidentiality and privacy.

Young people have access to a range of counselling and mental health services. We have a dedicated Mental Health Worker who works closely with workers and young people to identify mental health and counselling needs and then ensure that those young people have access to the appropriate support services. This may involve referring them on to a range of local specialist services.

In addition, young people have access to Lionmede in Chelmsford, which houses a multi-disciplinary team for children looked after in Essex. Workers can make referrals to Lionmede for young people who are at risk of their placement breaking down due to emotional and behavioural difficulties.

We give support and information to our young people who are parents or prospective parents. We encourage them and support them in gaining access to the proper healthcare for themselves and their children.

Young people who are misusing drugs and alcohol have access to appropriate advice and support to address these problems. We have a dedicated Substance Misuse Team who work closely with workers and young people to identify those for whom substance misuse is an issue and then ensure those young people have access to appropriate services. This might involve referring them on to a range of local specialist services. The team also organise activities and events aimed at encouraging positive lifestyle alternatives.

Where necessary, we give young people financial assistance with the cost of health, dental or optician's services. We also have a dedicated Benefits Advisor who works with employees and young people to ensure that young people access all benefits to which they are entitled. This includes access to free health, dental or eye care treatment where appropriate.

6. Stay safe

We want our young people to stay safe.

This means that we want all of our young people to have suitable and affordable accommodation and to feel safe and secure.

What we do to achieve this:

We provide suitable accommodation to our young people until their 18th birthday, and ensure that “move on” accommodation is available for those ready to move to independent, or semi-independent living. We have access to a dedicated 16+ Accommodation Team who source, provide and monitor appropriate accommodation.

From the age of 16 years young people may wish to move from foster care to semi-independent accommodation such as supported lodgings or supported housing projects. From the age of 18 they are able to have their own tenancies with the local housing authorities; if appropriate they can also remain in supported housing after the age of 18 depending on their individual needs. All decisions about moves to supported accommodation are based on an assessment of needs and preferences and included in the young person's pathway plan.

When young people in foster care reach the age of 18 years old they may request to remain living with their carer. Where appropriate this can be facilitated and the foster carer can change their status to become a supported lodgings provider.

It is unlikely that it will be appropriate for a young person to remain in a residential placement past the age of 18 years, although each young person's needs are comprehensively assessed and their wishes and feelings will be taken into account before any decision is made.

Every pathway plan includes a contingency should the agreed accommodation no longer be suitable or available, to ensure that young people have access to safe emergency accommodation.

We have five accommodation blocks, specifically for our young people, which we have built in partnership with Family Mosaic Housing Association. Each of these provides assured short hold tenancies for eight young people in a mixture of self contained and shared flats. Leaving and After Care work closely with Family Mosaic to ensure our young people receive a consistent and good service within this accommodation.

We take a strategic approach to anticipating and planning for accommodation needs. A series of “Local Steering Groups” have been established, which bring together representatives of district and borough housing authorities and key housing providers, to consider existing and anticipated accommodation needs for our young people. The aim is to encourage early joint planning to avoid the need for young people to be assessed as homeless. Leaving and After Care provides advice and information to assist housing authorities within the county in drawing up their “Homelessness Strategies” under the 2002 Homelessness Act.

All adults in contact with children and young people have a responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people. In Essex this will mean working in accordance with the SET Procedures for all children and young people under the age of 18. (See www.escb.co.uk). For those over 18 years of age Vulnerable Adults Procedures apply

(See <http://microsites.essexcc.gov.uk/microsites/ESAB>)

7. Enjoy and achieve

We want our young people to enjoy life and achieve.

This means we encourage and support each of our young people to achieve their potential in education and to enjoy leisure and recreational activities.

What we do to achieve this:

We encourage and plan young people's education, training and leisure activities based on a comprehensive assessment of their needs and this is recorded in detail in their care plans and pathway plans. These proposals build on information which is already included in the young person's personal education plan (PEP).

We work together with Connexions to ensure that young people receive appropriate careers advice and guidance up to the age of 25 years. We also work in partnership with the Princes Trust and through this our young people have access to a dedicated Princes Trust advisor who provides one to one intensive work to build up confidence, motivation and the self esteem of young people who wish to further their goals in connection with work, education and training.

We work in partnership with schools, colleges, educational support services and universities to ensure that our young people have access to educational opportunities that meet their abilities, needs and preferences.

Young people have access to a range of opportunities for out of school educational, cultural and leisure opportunities. Each of the four Leaving and After Care centres in the county organise a weekly evening "drop-in" event which varies in terms of content throughout the year. Additional activities are organised for other times of the year.

We encourage and support our young people to pursue further and higher education. We offer them a range of incentives and support to achieve this, including supplying all GCSE students and above with their own laptop and printer, including technical support, for their studies. We also offer each young person a financial incentive to encourage them to complete a degree level course.

8. Make a positive contribution

We want our young people to make a positive contribution.

This means that we encourage and support all of our young people to make a positive contribution to the development and delivery of services, and to the planning and decision making that affects their lives and their local communities.

What we do to achieve this:

We hold firmly to the principle that our young people are best placed to identify any gaps in the services we provide and to give us feedback as to the quality, and the impact of these services.

Young people have the opportunity to attend the county-wide Steering Group or Diversity Steering Group for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking young people which are held monthly. The steering group is chaired by a young person, and encourages young people to give their views on any aspect of the service they are receiving and on the direction in which they would like to see the service developed. Employees and young people from the four Leaving and After Care teams attend the Steering Group.

A number of our young people have undergone training to enable them to take part in the interviewing of employees and whenever possible a young person forms part of the interviewing panel.

When preparing pathway plans, workers ensure that young people's views are taken into account by having a face to face meeting with the young person in order to prepare the plan, wherever possible.

Young people are encouraged, supported and assisted to develop the skills necessary to advocate for themselves, both individually and collectively. Our aim is to enable our young people to develop independent living skills and this includes the ability to deal appropriately with other individuals and agencies in order to negotiate for their needs to be met. While our workers do negotiate on behalf of our young people the long term goal is for the young person to be able to advocate for themselves.

Young people are encouraged and supported to take part in volunteering and other opportunities in their local communities and within the local authority, including providing peer support to other young people in care. Our dedicated Princes Trust advisor takes a lead role in this.

We encourage our young people to attend the Associate Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers. This is a monthly forum which provides an opportunity for our young people to contribute to policy making.

9. Achieve economic well-being

We want our young people to achieve economic well-being.

This means we encourage and support all of our young people to achieve economic wellbeing through employment and provide them with appropriate financial support throughout their transition to adult life.

What we do to achieve this:

We have a Leaving and After Care Finance Handbook and a Fostering Payments and Allowances Handbook. These two key documents detail what financial support is available to young people via funding from this Department and through the benefits system. These documents are available to all employees, young people, carers and other relevant stakeholders.

We have a dedicated Leaving and After Care Benefits Advisor who provides advice and information about young people's entitlements to state benefits. This service is delivered Countywide and includes face to face meetings with young people and carers where requested.

All our young people's assessments and pathway plans include a comprehensive assessment of financial needs and how these needs will be met

The type of financial support that the Department provides includes weekly allowances, rental payments and one-off grants in specific circumstances. Further details of these payments are available in the Leaving and After Care Finance Handbook.

We also have an Incentive Payments Panel that meets regularly. Applications can be made to this panel by workers who wish to nominate a young person for a reward or incentive payment where they have shown exceptional achievements or progress in connection to work, education or training.

10. Fairness and diversity

We want to promote fairness and value diversity.

This means we want every young person to feel they have received a service from us which has valued diversity, promoted fairness and challenged any discrimination.

What we do to achieve this:

We are committed to providing high quality services that are sensitive to individual needs, delivered fairly and without prejudice. We recognise that care leavers and our employees have different needs and lifestyles and aim to ensure that no young person is disadvantaged by their differences in the way we deliver our services, provide information or carry out our employment functions.

All pathway plans are based on a comprehensive assessment of each young person's diverse needs. The young person's own perceptions and experiences are taken into account. The pathway plan then includes specific provision for meeting these needs. Where necessary, links are made to multi-agency services in the wider community which are able to meet the additional diverse needs of young people.

Young people are supported and encouraged to develop skills to recognise and challenge discrimination.

Essex County Council has a comprehensive Diversity and Equality Policy which is published on the Essex County Council website.

11. Preparation and care planning

We are committed to proper preparation and care planning.

Every young person receiving a Leaving and After Care service has a plan that accurately reflects how their short, medium and long-term needs will be met. Our aim is that all our young people are sufficiently prepared for adult life before leaving care and their plan reflects their individual needs.

What we do to achieve this:

All of our young people have a needs assessment and pathway plan that are updated at least every six months to comply with the requirements of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and Care Matters: Time for Change.

Pathway plans and needs assessments include sections on housing, education, training and employment, money, health, personal development (including life skills and leisure), personal support and contingencies. Pathway plans are signed by the young. It also forms a key document during the young person's review meeting.

Young people in custody, secured or sectioned continue to have regular contact with their allocated worker and have a pathway plan that recognises their care status. Plans are reviewed and updated to assess and meet their needs for continuous support during this period and in preparation for, and after, resettlement.

Care plans and pathway plans for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking young people reflect their status and possible outcomes of their asylum application, and reviews are overseen by a named Independent Reviewing Officer in line with statutory guidance. Plans take into account 'parallel planning' for asylum seekers who have not been given indefinite leave to remain, so that they are given the opportunity to prepare for remaining in the UK or for returning to their country of origin if their asylum application is refused.