

# Local Offer for Care Leavers

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The Local Offer is where you will find information to support care leavers aged 18 – 21, and 25 if in education or training



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**Walsall Council**





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## What it's all about?

Nobody said that growing up was easy, being in care can make life more complicated and additional support and guidance may be required. We understand that leaving care is a time of big changes in your life, and you will have many questions about the support you can get and the services that are available to you.

This guide will help you understand the support that we have here in Walsall for you as a Care Leaver. We want to make sure that you feel supported and you know who to go to for advice and support.



## The Legal bit... explaining your rights

In 2018 the government introduced new laws to ensure that any care leaver (up to the age of 25 years old) who wants and needs support from a Personal Advisor could get one. This has helped us to look at how we can make our services for Care Leavers better. We have been working together with different services, partners and care leavers to make sure that we have the right support available, at the right time to help and that it is easy to understand and access. As a Local Authority we are your Corporate Parents, this may seem like a strange term but it means that we are here to offer you the support and guidance that others would expect from a reasonable parent. More importantly, you have the right to be involved in all decisions about your plans for leaving care.

To be able to get support set out in this leaflet, you must have been in care for a period of at least 13 weeks (or periods amounting to 13 weeks) which began after age 14 and included some time after your 16th Birthday. If you are not sure whether you qualify for support then you can ask your Personal Advisor or Social Worker for further guidance.

### National care Leavers Charter

The Government has published a Care Leavers Charter which young people like you helped to draw up. This is a set of pledges which Walsall Council agrees to and with this we promise:

- To respect and honour your identity
- To believe in you
- To listen to you
- To inform you
- To support you
- To find you a home
- To be a lifelong champion

### For full details of the Charter visit:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-leavers-charter](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-leavers-charter)



## Your Personal Advisor

Your Social Worker will be responsible for supporting you up until you reach the age of 18. At 17, you will be provided with a Personal Advisor that will start to work alongside your Social Worker to support you in your transition into adult life. Once you have discussed your wishes and ideas with your workers, together you will draw up a Pathway Plan to cover the different parts of your life you may need support with. This may be your education, training and employment, where you will live, your health, money and other personal support needs.

Since April 2018, Care Leavers have the right to Personal Advisor support up to the age of 25. Their role is to help you prepare for independence and the amount of support they can offer will depend on what you want and your circumstances. Until you reach 21, your Personal Advisor will see you at least once every 2 months and will keep in contact with you in between visits.

## Pathway Plans

We will start helping you to develop your Pathway Plan from the age of 16. This will set out what support you will need prior to moving into independence. It is important that you are involved in this plan as it will set out what you want to achieve and how we will support you to do this. This plan will be reviewed every 6 months as part of your ongoing care planning and can be changed in order to fit in with your needs.

You may also wish to be provided with an advocate or other support such as peer mentors. This is something that we will aim to provide. You may also wish to be included in the Children in Care Council whilst you are still in care. If you are interested then you can contact our Children's Champion Michelle Cummings on 01922 650555 ext 5710 or 07787 284 682 or email [Michelle.Cummings@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:Michelle.Cummings@walsall.gov.uk)

Housing

Whatever happens, your Social Worker and Personal Advisor should help you to find suitable accommodation for when you leave care.

What is suitable accommodation?

Suitable accommodation is somewhere that is safe and right for you and should be somewhere that will help you to develop your skills as you transition into adulthood. Many young people feel that they must have their own property by law, but this is not the case and having the responsibility of this at an early age may not be right for you. There are a number of housing options for young people to consider and this will have been discussed with you as part of your pathway plan. Some of the options available to you may be:



**Supported Accommodation**

This is where you live independently but with staff on hand to support you. There are different arrangements on offer and may include shared houses, bedsits, small projects with self contained flats or even student accommodation or as part of an apprenticeship.

**Staying with your foster carer/Staying put**

If you are living with foster carers, there may be an option for you to remain living with them after you turn 18. This is called Staying Put arrangements and will have been discussed with both you and your carers as part of your pathway planning.

**Homelessness**

As a Care Leaver, Walsall has a duty to give you help and guidance to prevent you from becoming homeless. If you are feeling worried or concerned about this or are struggling to manage where you are living then advice and support is available. Please speak to your Personal Advisor immediately if you are worried.

**Residential Care**

You may need to stay on in Residential care if this is felt the best way to give you the support that you need.

**Tips about choosing the right kind of accommodation**

Things that need to be considered when choosing the right accommodation should include:

- Is it near to college, work, family and friends?
- How do you feel about sharing a kitchen and living areas with other people?
- What kind of support do you need – someone to talk to every day or as and when you need it?
- What are your responsibilities – how will you pay your bills and maintain your property such as cleaning and ensuring it remains a safe place to live?

**Own Tenancy**

This is a big responsibility and it may not be the best option immediately when leaving care. In Walsall we will ensure that you have priority housing and can consider a tenancy for you to carry on in your own right once you turn 18 as part of a current arrangement with Walsall Housing Group. A tenancy is a legal document which entitles a person to live in a property and outlines the responsibilities that go with this. There are different types of tenancy agreements and this can be confusing. Always make sure that you keep a copy and that you have understood it before signing. Your Personal Advisor will support you in doing this. We will also be able to help you maintain your tenancy and will offer advice and guidance on how you can pay your bills. In Walsall you will be exempt from paying your council tax until you reach the age of 25, even if you live outside of Walsall Whatever you decide what is right for you, we can help you to move in and you can use your setting up home grant in order to buy furniture and other things that you may need. All of this will be done with the support of your Personal Advisor.

Education, Training and Employment

We want every young person leaving care to have the support to fulfil their goals in life and we want you to have the skills and experience you need to become a successful and independent person. You may have an idea as to what sort of career you want and the type of work that you would like to do. Whatever your goal, your Personal Advisor can support you in accessing this.

You may decide you want to:

- Stay on at school
- Go to college
- Start an apprenticeship
- Get a job
- Go to university
- Get some work experience or do some voluntary work

Whether you are thinking of studying or wishing to enter the workforce, there are a number of options available to you and we are on hand to offer the right guidance and support. We can support you to draw up a CV and as an employer, Walsall Council have a range of apprenticeships that you can consider applying for. There is also the Care Leavers Covenant that links in with local businesses that can offer employment and work experience opportunities. There is a dedicated Impact worker based at the TLC Hub that can support you with employment and training opportunities.

We can also take you to college and university open days so that you can see what is on offer and whether you would wish to consider attending.



Other useful contacts:	
<a href="http://www.direct.gov.uk">www.direct.gov.uk</a> (Education and Training)	<a href="http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk">www.apprenticeships.org.uk</a>
<a href="http://www.gov.uk">www.gov.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.princes-trust.org.uk">www.princes-trust.org.uk</a>
<a href="http://www.nationalcareleaversservice.direct.gov.uk">www.nationalcareleaversservice.direct.gov.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.totaljobs.com">www.totaljobs.com</a>
<a href="http://www.jobsite.co.uk">www.jobsite.co.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.wmjobs.co.uk">www.wmjobs.co.uk</a>
<a href="http://www.monster.com">www.monster.com</a>	<a href="http://www.jobs4u.co.uk">www.jobs4u.co.uk</a>

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Money Matters

As part of your Pathway Plan we will help you to understand how to manage your finances. We can help you to open a bank account, formulate a budget plan, help you claim the correct benefits and provide you with all the information in regards to your financial entitlements as a care leaver. Some of these include:

- If you are aged 16 and 17 and living in supported accommodation and are unable to claim for benefits, you will be offered a weekly allowance equivalent to state benefits and wherever possible this will be paid into your bank accounts.
- You are entitled to be provided with a setting home grant of up to £2000. This can be used for you to pay for essential furniture and other items.
- Support to access your Junior ISA
- We will provide you with an annual festival payment of £50.
- You will receive a gift for your birthday of £25 (when you are 19 or 20 years of age), £50 on your 18th and 21st.
- Support you to meet the extra ordinary costs of travel to maintain contact with family or previous carers to promote relationships and reduce isolation.
- Pay for the first key documents such as a passport or driving licence.
- Consider addition payment towards travel costs, book's and equipment for those of you in apprenticeships and further education, this will be based on individual need and your Personal Advisor will give me more advice on this.
- Those of you in further education offered a small financial reward of £50 for demonstrated effort.

You may also be entitled to some welfare benefits. This is a provision from the Department for Work and Pensions for people either looking for work or on a low income. This includes benefits such as universal credit, job seekers allowance, income support and employment support allowance. Walsall Care Leaving Service has a joint protocol with local JobCentre Plus (Department of Works and Pensions) to allow for two-way communication between named staff at the DWP and a named personal advisor to allow them to solve any administrative issues in respect of your benefits.

Other useful contacts:
<a href="http://www.gov.uk/benefits">www.gov.uk/benefits</a>
<a href="http://www.studentfinancedirect.co.uk">www.studentfinancedirect.co.uk</a>



Health and wellbeing

Your physical and mental health is important and so we will support you in accessing relevant services that can assist you in living a healthy and happy lifestyle. In order to do this we will:

- Provide you with an up to date health passport
- Help you to register with a GP and Dentist local to where you live and attend any medical appointments with you if necessary.
- We can offer you advice and support around your sexual health. Walsall Integrated Sexual Health (WiSH) is a local service that offers drop in advice, free emergency contraception and sexual health screening.
- We can offer you advice and support in regards to drug and alcohol misuse and help you to engage with services that have specialist support such as the Beacon (CGL).
- Help you to identify and engage with sports clubs and any extra curricular activities that you may be interested in.

In addition to this, we will ensure that your Personal Advisor supports you to access counselling services. Walsall Talking Therapies (Walsall and Dudley Mental Health Trust) is open to anyone over the age of 17 who is registered with a Walsall GP. You can also self-refer online or use the free phone number 0800 953 0995. Walsall Council also has a licence to enable you to access an online counselling service. com This is an online counselling service that is a free, confidential, safe and an anonymous way to ask for help. The service is for young people up to the age of 25 and is available from 12 noon to 10 pm Monday to Friday and from 6 pm to 10 pm at weekends.

Other useful contacts:	
<a href="http://www.youngminds.org.uk">www.youngminds.org.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.healthline.com">www.healthline.com</a>
<a href="http://www.wclld.co.uk">www.wclld.co.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.walsallsexualhealth.co.uk">www.walsallsexualhealth.co.uk</a>
<a href="http://www.changegrowlive.org.uk">www.changegrowlive.org.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.rehab4addiction.co.uk">www.rehab4addiction.co.uk</a>

Relationships

As well as the support you will receive from your Personal Advisor, we may be able to offer you additional practical and emotional support. The Transitions and Leaving Care Hub runs a drop in service every fortnight where you can come along. This is a safe space where you can meet other young people and engage in activities. In addition to this you will be notified of specific events/activities including sports, cooking, CV writing, arts and crafts and many more. Any ideas that you may have for future activities will be appreciated so please share these with your Personal Advisor.



We will also help you to manage or regain contact with people special to you or have cared for you in the past like family members and friends, foster carers, residential staff or social workers.

Participation in Society

We want our Care Leavers to be active members of society and to have the chances that all young adults have. We want you to feel part of a community and be proud of where you live. Your views and experiences are important and we want you to have the opportunity to share them with us to make things better for you and others in the future. The Children in Care Council offers volunteering opportunities, support and the chance to meet other young people with similar experiences. Your Personal Advisor will help you to enrol on the local electoral register so that you can have a say and vote on issues that impact you and your community. We will also encourage you to get involved in shaping services, in challenging discrimination or barriers you may face as a care leaver and make sure your voice is heard and you are listened to. We will also advise you how to access the Advocacy Service or contact the Coram Advocacy Service, both of which are independent of the council.

We always want to hear from you about how you are getting on and we are proud of you and what you can achieve. We hope that we have done things well but recognise that there is always room for improvement. This is why it is important that you have your say and share your experiences. We would encourage you to take up as many of the opportunities on offer and make the most of the advice, information and support that is available to you. If you need any further information or wish to discuss anything that is outlined in this offer then please speak to your Personal Advisor.

Contacts:	
<a href="http://www.nyas.net">www.nyas.net</a> ( <i>National Youth Advocacy Service</i> )	<a href="http://www.rights4u.org">www.rights4u.org</a>
<a href="http://www.coramvoice.org.uk">www.coramvoice.org.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.mind.org.uk">www.mind.org.uk</a>
<a href="http://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help-you/contact-us">www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help-you/contact-us</a>	<a href="http://www.stbasils.org.uk">www.stbasils.org.uk</a>
<a href="http://www.shelter.org.uk">www.shelter.org.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.nhs.org">www.nhs.org</a>
<a href="http://www.do-it.org">www.do-it.org</a> ( <i>Volunteer service</i> )	<a href="http://www.becomecharity.org.uk">www.becomecharity.org.uk</a>
<a href="http://www.nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk">www.nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk">www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk</a> ( <i>Guidance and support in respect of your entitlements as a care leaver</i> )



