

Oxfordshire County Council

Care leavers: OUR LOCAL OFFER



**OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL**

Oxfordshire County Council Care Leavers local offer

Introduction

We know that leaving care is a big step and we want to make sure that you feel supported and know where and who to come to for advice and help. Just because you are leaving care, or have already left care, we haven't stopped caring about you. Here we explain the support and guidance available if you have been in the care of Oxfordshire County Council.

Care experienced young people in Oxfordshire have helped with this information and we will continue to listen to your views to make sure we offer what you need.

The Care Leaver Local Offer will be reviewed every year with the help of The Children in Care Council and The Oxfordshire Care Leavers Association.

To be eligible for the support described in the local offer, you must have been in care for a total of at least 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 please ask your Social Worker or Personal Adviser.



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1. SUPPORT YOU ARE LEGALLY ENTITLED TO

1.1 Advice and Support from a Personal Adviser (PA)

If you are under 25 years of age you can now ask for support from your Personal Adviser even if you are not in education or training. Personal Advisers are part of the Leaving Care Team.

Your PA can help you with independent living and a range of advice and support. Personal Advisers should talk to you about what support you need and record this information in your **Pathway Plan**.

Your Pathway Plan is written by Oxfordshire County Council after consultation with you and important people in your life. It sets out your needs, views and future goals, and identifies exactly what support you will receive from us. We will review your pathway plan with you regularly so it is kept up to date.

We will try to make sure you keep the same Personal Adviser, though this is not always possible. The amount of support that you receive from your Personal Adviser will depend on your circumstances.

You might, for example, need extra support because:

- You have special educational needs or a disability
- You are in or leaving custody or you have had contact with the criminal justice system
- You are a young parent
- You are going through a tough time in your personal life (relationships, health, housing, employment or studies)
- You are an unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child (UASC) and your immigration status is unclear

1.2 Your right to be heard and taken seriously

You have a right to be involved in all decisions about your plans for leaving care. You have a right to support from an independent advocate if you want to challenge decisions about the support we give you. Independent advocates can inform you about your rights and help you to be heard in meetings. They are independent of Children's Services. In Oxfordshire you can access VIVA - Volunteer Independent Visiting and Advocacy, to request support from an independent advocate who can act as a representative or assists you with getting their voice heard.

You have the right to see the information we keep about you, including the files and records written about you when you were in care.

1.3 Leaving care before turning 18

We will encourage you to stay in care until you are 18. Most young people still live at home with their families at this age. If you choose to leave care before age 18, the law says we must provide you with suitable accommodation.

1.4 Support to engage in Education, Employment or Training

We want to make sure every young person leaving care has the support to achieve their goals in life. The law says we must provide you with assistance with expenses linked with employment, education and training.

In particular:

- We will provide you with a Higher Education (HE) bursary of at least £2,000 if you go to university
- We will provide somewhere for you to stay during University holidays (or funding for this if you would prefer to make your own arrangements) if you are in full time Higher Education or full time residential Further Education and your term time accommodation is not available.

1.5 Staying put with your former foster carer

If you and your foster carer(s) agree for you to stay together, then we will support you to remain with foster carers under what is called a 'Staying Put' arrangement. This can last until you are age 21. You can ask your Leaving Care PA about this.

1.6 Frequently Asked Questions

Who will help me and how?

Most young people will be supported by a Social Worker whilst in care until 18yrs old. Between 16 years and 25 years you can receive support from a Personal Advisor. In some cases, your social worker will remain your Personal Advisor when you leave care as an adult.

What is a Leaving Care Personal Advisor?

If you are an Oxfordshire Care Leaver, your Leaving Care PA will be someone from an Oxfordshire Looked After & Leaving Care team. It is their job to provide advice, make plans (such as a *Pathway Plan*, see below) with you, so that you have all the things that you need whilst you are looked after, help you with practical assistance and the skills needed to become a successful independent adult and visit you regularly to make sure that you are getting on okay.

You can talk to them about anything – if you're having problems, or are worried about something, or if you just fancy a chat.



What is a Pathway Plan?

The Pathway Plan is a continuation of your care plan and looks at the support and skills you will need when you leave care and as an adult. If you are over 16, you will have a Pathway Plan.

It will look at what you need to live independently and is designed to help you make the most of life and develop useful skills that could help you in the future.

It will include things like:

- where you will live
- any education or training you might want to be involved in
- jobs
- money (including financial support from us)
- financial management support such as opening a bank account
- applying for a National Insurance number and identification documents
- cultural or identity needs
- your health and your lifestyle.

How can I be involved in planning?

All planning for you should always consider your views, wishes and needs. The best way to make this happens is to be actively involved in your Looked After Review Meetings and in developing your Care Plan or Pathway Plan. Chat and ask questions.

Can I leave care before turning 18? What help could I still get?

Young people can choose to leave care before they turn 18 however this is something that we do not encourage. The Director of Children's Services for Oxfordshire County Council must sign off all decisions to allow a 16- or 17-year-old to leave care. As this is such a big decision to make we would introduce you to an Independent Advocate so that they can help you make the decision.

Where a young person does choose to leave care before they are 18, we will help to ensure they are in suitable accommodation and provide assistance to meet their needs relating to education, training or employment as set out in their Pathway Plan.

Other than a Personal Advisor what does the local authority have to provide?

As a minimum, we must provide:

- assistance with expenses associated with employment, education and training.
- a higher education bursary of £2,000 if you go into higher education.
- suitable accommodation during vacations if you are in higher education or in residential further education.

No two people are the same, therefore any other support that we can offer will be based on your needs, plans and engagement with your Pathway Plan.





There are other things we can do to help. We have listed some of them below.

2. OTHER SUPPORT FOR CARE LEAVERS UNDER 21 YEARS IN OXFORDSHIRE

2.1 Accommodation

Helping you to remain settled:

- We will support you to stay in your foster placement until you are 21, if that's best for you and your foster carers. This doesn't mean you must do this, nor that you must stay until you are 21.
- If you are living in supported housing we will help you to remain there for as long as you need, up to the age of 25. This means you can move out into independence when you are ready. We offer a range of accommodation types that offer support according to what is needed.

Helping you to move on:

- At 17 ½ you will be invited to a Housing Options meeting at Housing Allocations Officer in Oxfordshire to help understand your housing options once you turn 18 and what you need to do.
- If you have additional needs and are working well to achieve your goals you may be helped to obtain an extra priority status to move into social housing.
- Your Personal Advisor will help you to understand the amount of money that you need to earn from employment or claim from benefits to be able to pay your rent. This is especially important in case your rent increases due to tenancy changes or housing benefit allowance changes when you turn 22 years old.

Help in your home:

- As part of turning 18, your social worker or leaving care Personal Advisor will undertake a '*Transition checklist*' with you, looking at key documents and helping you to understand your budgeting and bills and that you are familiar with the place and area where you are living.
- We will help with the expenses of moving into independence such as moving costs, along with £25 to help with food and essential items in your first week.
- You will also receive up to £2000 Setting Up Home Allowance to help towards furnishing your new home.
- Your Personal Advisor or housing support worker will give you advice about maintaining a tenancy, including avoiding rent or Council Tax arrears, paying bills and managing your visitors.
- We will help you to access rent deposit schemes (if these aren't available we will cover your first rent deposit). This deposit can be kept for the next time it is needed.
- We can also request help from other professionals and support services to assist you in adjusting to your new surroundings, if you would find this helpful.

- We recognise that life has its ups and downs and sometimes there are tricky decisions to be made. We will talk to you about what your goals are, the steps to achieve them and further opportunities for education, employment and training, housing and careers.

2.2 Education, Employment & Training (referred to as 'EET')

We want you to succeed in your education, training and employment and will support you as much as we can with each of these. We will ask you how you are doing, and be ready to celebrate your achievements with you.

We can offer you:

- Career information and advice, such as help to develop your CV, advice about courses, job and interviews.
- As a large employer, our Human Resources department can organise short term work experience and one-to-one guidance about applying for jobs at the Council, including our Apprenticeship schemes. Your Personal Advisor can make this contact for you. All Care Leavers are guaranteed an interview for Oxfordshire County Council roles for which they apply providing they meet at least the essential criteria.
- Oxfordshire County Council covers an extensive range of different roles, professions, and occupations. We are a good employer, and will help you to develop your career. Your Personal Advisor can make this contact for you

We recognise there are costs to finding a job and there are various grants available to care leavers, that we can help you to access. Examples of what grants can be spent on include:

- Two sets of interview/work/college clothes
- A haircut for interview.
- Equipment for work
- Equipment/trips/uniform for college
- £20 towards stationery for the start of an education course.
- £15 towards a school/college/work bag
- Additional EET related activity e.g. tickets to end of year celebrations and or excursion dependent on attendance
- Travel for appointments/ interviews.
- Travel for those earning under £150 per week on the days they need to attend learning, volunteering or working. This can either be:
 - a. a bus pass (applications for pass via educational institutions to be made where possible) or;
 - b. a bicycle package including a bike, a helmet, lights and padlock. This would be supplemented by a bus pass in January and February.



- Full-time work bridging grant of JSA/ISA equivalent per week for a maximum of 4 weeks while waiting for first salary payment.
- Support for child care costs to access EET and/or engagement with support services
- 75% contribution to costs of 10 driving Lessons, where linked to EET activity

We believe that the more you do the better off you will be in the long term therefore we will offer you an EET Incentive of £30 for Full Time (30hrs per week) activity and £15 for Part Time (min 15 hours per week) for learning, working and/or volunteering that does not already attract a bursary or maintenance grant. This can include financial support to top up low paid apprenticeships.

Studying, learning and career progression take time, hard work and commitment. To recognise this, we offer:

- Upon successful completion of a University or Apprenticeship Level 4-6 we offer a grant of £1000. With £750 for a Level 3 - 4 HE/FE/Apprenticeship completion,
- Negotiable grant up to £500 for Level 2 FE/Apprenticeship completion for specific support to access employment e.g. tools, uniforms, travel expenses.
- A graduation/course completion celebration meal.

2.3 Support if you go to University

If you are considering going to University, the Virtual School can provide you with specialist career advice to help you make the best choices to achieve your goals. We will financially support you with the following:

- Local Authority Bursary. (£250 per payment to make a total of £2000 over 8 terms).
- Setting Up Home Allowance if needed e.g. kitchenware and linen, of up to £2000. This is accessible until you are 25yrs old.
- £500 contribution to a computer
- Funding for travel to and from university at the beginning and end of term. Plus one 'family' contact per term (as agreed with Personal Adviser). Also includes visiting during application process and moving costs.
- A term-time bus pass if needed.
- Essential Reading/Kit/Equipment, as required.
- Vacation accommodation, to be discussed with your Personal Advisor
- Up to £50 per month to access university leisure facilities
- Health – Any additional costs to be discussed with your LCPA. Travel to hospital appointments outside the young person's locality paid by local authority.
- Graduation - photos, gown hire and contribution to ball ticket etc, as required.
- £50 for a celebration meal with your Personal Advisor when you graduate.
- £1000-degree course completion grant
- Vocational course placement costs and travel, as required e.g. Languages courses compulsory leaning abroad.
- A dyslexia assessment if needed.

2.4 Health and Wellbeing

We will support you to assess health needs and identify specialist referrals where required, we can offer:

- A health passport
- Signposting to where you can get help to pay for prescription costs.
- Support to register at health services when you move home.
- Support to move from CAMHS to Adult Services, if required
- Paying for transport costs when attending hospital or doctors' appointments.
- Support if you are also a young parent (see below, parenting)
- Free or subsidised access to the local authority's leisure centres.
- 50% contribution to necessary/essential dental work. If you are not in receipt of benefits we will pay for an annual dental check.
- A £40 contribution to prescription glasses/contact lenses

We want to help as much as we can to ensure you look after your health and get any support you need to stay healthy. To do this we can offer:

- If you are a smoker and would like to stop you can get free patches and gum and an advisor who is trained to help you stop smoking. You are four times more likely to quit with this support than if you do it on your own. For more information visit www.smokefreelifeoxfordshire.gov.uk
- You can get online access to your medical record held by your doctor, if your doctor is in Oxfordshire.
- If you are worried about being overweight and would like some advice or access to a free weight loss programme contact Achieve Healthy Weight Loss Oxfordshire at <https://achieveoxfordshire.org.uk/>
- If you have diabetes there is extra help to get you moving more, which can help manage your diabetes. For more information visit <https://www.getoxfordshireactive.org/doyouhavediabetes>.
- Support and advice if drugs or alcohol are causing a problem in your life. Contact Turning Point if you are 18 or over or Aquarius if you are under 18 years.
- Access to free self-sampling sexual health testing kits and condoms visit <https://www.sexualhealthoxfordshire.nhs.uk>. You can also get advice on contraception like the pill or the morning after pill (up to 72 hours) from local clinics across Oxfordshire.

2.5 Finances

Becoming an adult and living independently can be complicated, so we offer some other financial support which can include:

- Leaving Care Personal Allowance: To match current ISA/JSA levels (£57.90 per week, and is fixed for 4 years)
- or ASS S4 levels for All Appeal Rights Exhausted Asylum Seekers (£35.39 pw) where determined needed by Human Rights Assessment. This money pays for essential toiletries, food and entertainment.
- We can provide up to five weeks of grant to ensure a smooth transition between leaving care support employment or benefits payments if needed. Any further funding needed to cover transition due to delays in processing may be loaned to you, by signed agreement, and recouped on payment of benefits.
- Whilst working with us, we will ensure provision of a suitable and appropriate placement (or the means to secure the accommodation) up to your 21st birthday and support with access to 'move-on schemes' to secure housing as it becomes available.
- Celebrating occasions with you
- Help with travel when part of an agreed EET activity agreement
- Support with key documents e.g. Birth certificates, passports etc.,
- Funding for a provisional driving licence, driving practical test and driving theory test when agreed as part of an EET plan.
- We will help you to undertake advanced claims for benefits, applications for student finance and any other grants/bursaries that you can access.

2.6 Additional Support

We want to be able to support all care leavers in the county. If you have any additional needs, we can offer additional support. This can include:

- Signposting and introductions to specialist services and support e.g. for health, special educational needs, asylum advice, making challenges or requests/Support available to Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (see appendix).
- Celebrating birthdays and Christmas.
- Supporting you to learn additional skills e.g. gaining driving licence.
- Enabling you to participate in additional activities and learning.

2.7 Parenting

There may be additional support we can identify if you are a parent, for example:

- The NHS Family Nurse Partnership is a home visiting programme for first-time young mums and families and offers wellbeing and parenting support for the first two years of a baby's life.
- Surestart maternity grant is a one-off payment to help towards the cost of having a child. Young parents can access this from week 29 of pregnancy until 3 months post birth.
- Lone parents can apply for healthy start vouchers to help purchase milk and fresh/frozen fruit and vegetables.

2.8 Living in the Community



We want you to be an active member of society with good connections with your local community We can help in the following ways:

- Providing information on groups and clubs you may wish to join
- Informing you about awards, schemes, and competitions you can enter, in line with your talents and interests
- Helping you to enrol on the Electoral Register, so you can vote in elections
- Informing you about voluntary work that we think you may be interested in
- Helping with some costs of leisure activities e.g. Free access to leisure centres for Care Leavers in West Oxfordshire
- Offering you advice and helping you to challenge any discrimination



3. WHO ELSE COULD OFFER YOU SUPPORT?

There are plenty of opportunities to ask for support. The list below is some suggestions, but there is nothing to stop you asking for help from anyone that you feel able to ask. Your Personal Advisor could also help you with this. Don't feel that you can only ask certain people.

3.1.Key contacts

- Personal Adviser
- Housing advice
- Named nurses
- EET support
- Oxfordshire County Council leadership e.g. the Director of Children's Services, Director of Adult Services, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Cabinet member for Children and Family Services

3.2.Support networks/groups

- Mentoring, Coaching and Advocacy organisations, see [Oxfordshire Community Foundation](#) for a selection of projects, or search online.
- [Oxfordshire Care Leavers Association](#)

3.3 Other places you can go for help

National

[The Care Leavers Association Shelter](#), [Citizens Advice](#)

Local

[Oxfordshire Provider Map](#) on Virtual School for Looked After Children website

The *City of Oxfordshire Charity* may be able to help towards educational costs, sickness help and general housing grant help. *City of Oxford Charity, The Office, Stones Court, St Clements, Oxford, OX4 1AP* <http://oxfordcitycharity.org.uk/>

Turn2Us may be able to help with benefits and grants availability. <https://www.turn2us.org.uk/>

3.4 Emergency Food Provision

Please contact your Personal Adviser as soon as you can if you feel you are really struggling with basics such as food. As a short-term safety net, there are food banks across the county.

West Oxfordshire Food Bank 07557 979 384

North Oxfordshire Community Food Bank 07929721172

Community Emergency Food bank (C.E.F oxford city) 01993 810 622



Banbury Food bank
01295 661 304

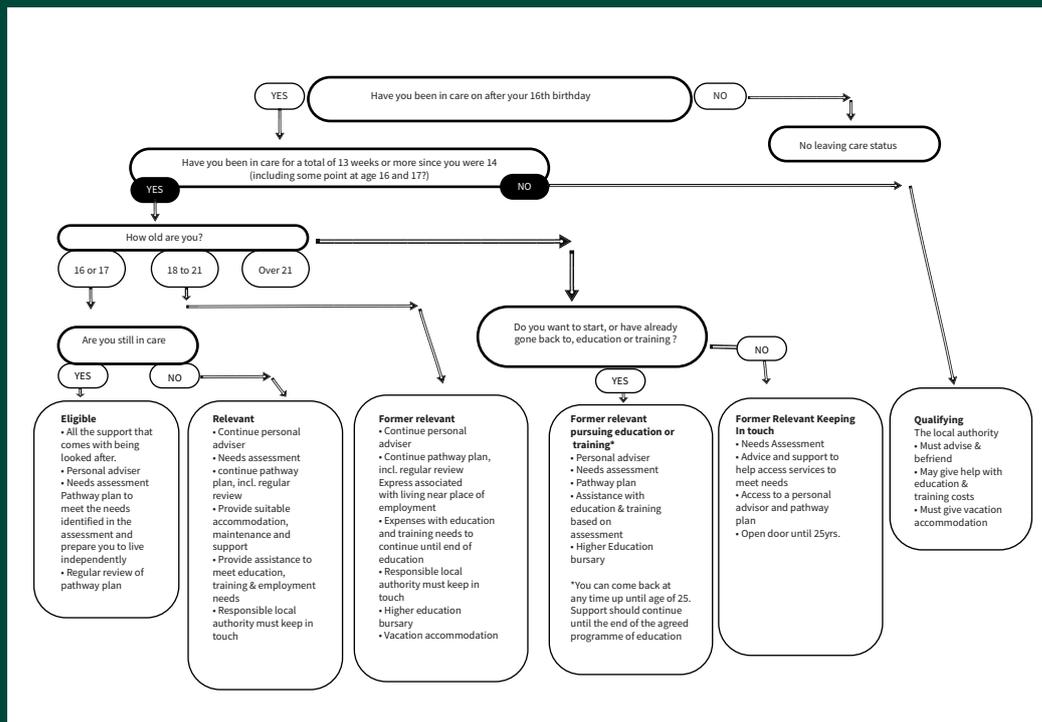
Bicester Food Bank
01869 357181

4. APPENDIX

4.1 Our starting point - In Oxfordshire we believe that these principles should underpin the support given to you:

- In all discussions affecting the young person their needs, welfare and rights will always be given paramount consideration;
- Care planning should reflect the gradual transition of a young person from dependence to independence and formulated with the significant people in their lives;
- Preparation for leaving care should reflect good child care practice generally, which includes allowing people to make mistakes;
- A young person's self- esteem, self- confidence and wellbeing should be promoted by providing the stability and security that gives them the opportunity and freedom to explore, and the support to learn from their mistakes;
- Young people's responsibility in managing their own finances should be developed, including ensuring that they know their full entitlement;
- All preparation for leaving care and provision of after care must take account of the religious persuasion, racial origin, cultural and linguistic background and other needs of young people and be planned in conjunction with other agencies;
- Young people will be encouraged to be involved and influence the standards of practice and developments within leaving care service provisions.
- 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;
- Prepare young people gradually to be ready to leave care, paying attention to positive social networks, practical self-care needs - health, budgeting, domestic skills - and personal and relationship dimensions;
- The authority's intervention and innovative thinking puts young people on the pathway to success as they make their transition to adulthood.

4.2. Are you a care leaver?



4.3 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) who turn 18 can access support from the County Council

Former Relevant UASC care leavers who turn 18yrs and have not received an initial decision on their asylum application would normally (if not supported by LA) be able to access financial support Other needs will be assessed within the pathway planning process and supported under the former relevant finance policy.

Lone parents: paid at the standard adult JSA rate with healthy start vouchers. The equivalent of healthy start vouchers will also be paid whilst awaiting a determination. This is to be spent on milk, plain fresh or frozen fruit and vegetables (fruit and vegetables with nothing added), or infant formula milk.

Pregnant women get one Healthy Start voucher a week
 Babies under the age of one get two vouchers a week
 Children aged over one and under four get one voucher

Health costs:

HC2 form should be completed for health care: <http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/HealthCosts/1128.aspx>

4.4 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) who become Appeal Rights Exhausted (ARE)

Young people who become ARE and are Human Rights Assessed as having a barrier to return to their country of origin will receive support. This support can be granted whilst an Assisted/Voluntary Return Package is arranged, until the barrier to return is removed, until 21yrs or until returned to their country of origin whichever comes first. After 21years and if the young person is making a fresh claim for asylum they will be supported by the UKBA.

Maternity grant of £250 (matches S4 Asylum support amount) Available from 8 weeks before the 'due date'.

Pregnant mother can receive an extra payment of £3 per week.

Parent with child under 3 yrs can receive an extra £5 per week.

Leisure: ARE y/p are encouraged to attend leisure activities that are provided by Asylum Welcome and other free community activities.

Allowance: £35.30 pw (Matched to NASS S4 levels for All Appeal Rights Exhausted Asylum Seekers) where determined needed by Human Rights Assessment. This money pays for essential toiletries, food and entertainment.

Clothing: £150 per year, assessed within Pathway Planning, which will deliver the basic requirements of: winter coat, hat, gloves, scarf, trainers, socks, nightwear and underpants, two jumpers / hoodies, three pairs of jeans / trousers, five T-shirts

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