

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL LEAVING CARE POLICY STATEMENT

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Young people leaving the care of Hertfordshire County Council will be provided with the same degree of support as that which would be provided by any good parent who continues to support their children whilst they make the transition to adulthood. This includes a good home, support, help, companionship, respect, appropriate rules, security, and a happy environment.

CARE PLANNING

We will ensure that each young person who is looked after away from home will live within a culture, which continuously promotes preparation and planning with them to leave care.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The preparation and planning for education and training for care leavers will reflect their aspirations and abilities and be aimed at increasing their life chances in adulthood. All care leavers will be supported through at least one course of further education of their choice

EMPLOYMENT

We will improve young people's opportunities for entering the world of employment by providing work experience placements and ensuring that all care leavers are supported through at least one transition into employment of their choice.

ACCOMMODATION

All care leavers will be supported to live in accommodation commensurate with their assessed need. We will ensure that all care leavers move into suitable and safe accommodation and we will actively work with them to prevent them becoming homeless.

PERSONAL SUPPORT

All care leavers will be supported to enable them to maintain their health and development and to take part in their community. All care leavers will be provided with a Personal Adviser who will provide the emotional and practical support they require to meet their needs.

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
LEAVING CARE POLICY**

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1. Guiding Principles

- 1.1 Hertfordshire County Council's policy reflects the principles of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 which are to improve the life chances of young people living in and leaving local authority care.
Young people leaving the care of Hertfordshire County Council will be provided with the same degree of support as that which would be provided by any good parent who continues to support their children whilst they make the transition to adulthood. This includes a good home, support, help, companionship, respect, appropriate rules, security, and a happy environment.
- 1.2 The service provided will start from the needs of the care leaver and will provide holistic support that reflects all their social, educational and accommodation needs.
- 1.3 Young people who are looked after by Hertfordshire County Council are not expected to leave care until they are demonstrably prepared and ready to do so; there is, within this, an expectation that many more young people will remain looked after until they are eighteen years old
- 1.4 We will ensure that the assessment and planning for leaving care prepares young people well for adult life.
- 1.5 We will actively involve young people in the preparation and planning for leaving care.
- 1.6 We will ensure that there are staged moves to independence with the ability to fall back on more supportive arrangements should this prove necessary.
- 1.7 We will continue to offer the necessary personal support to young people after they cease to be looked after.
- 1.8 All preparation for leaving care and provision of after care will take account of the religious persuasion, racial origin, cultural, linguistic and other needs of the individual young person.
- 1.9 These principles complement the objectives of the Quality Protects programme. Quality Protects National Objective 5 is "to ensure that young people leaving care, as they enter adulthood, are not isolated and participate socially and economically as citizens". This Objective reflects the need for care leavers to enjoy economic viability and independence whilst at the same time requiring their local authority to emulate the extended support afforded to children in their own families well into early adulthood.
- 1.10 Hertfordshire County Council will ensure that it fulfills its statutory duties under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and will fully use its powers

under the Act to support care leavers as indicated in their Pathway Plans (*See Appendix A2: Legal framework*).

2. Care Planning Commitments to Care Leavers

2.1 Hertfordshire County Council will ensure that each young person who is looked after away from home will live within a culture, which continuously promotes preparation and planning for them to leave care from their point of entry into the care system.

This will include help whilst they are still in care with developing the practical skills and introduction to appropriate support services that they will need for independent living.

2.2 Preparation for leaving care will reflect good childcare practice, following the principles of the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

2.3 Preparation and planning for leaving care will be achieved through the statutory review process for looked after children and the formulation of pathway plans for over-16s. All care leavers aged 16 and over, whether they continue to be looked after or not, will have a designated Personal Adviser and a pathway plan, which will include details of how their future needs will be met up to the age of 21, or beyond if in an agreed course of education or training. Disabled young people can have a Personal Adviser up to their 25th birthday if required.

2.4 The priority for leaving care and after-care services will be those young people currently and previously “looked after” by Hertfordshire County Council who are defined as eligible & relevant children under Children (Leaving Care) Act, for whom there is a duty to assess and meet their needs. Hertfordshire County Council has a duty to these young people and to former relevant children to appoint a Personal Adviser, prepare and review a Pathway Plan and ‘keep in touch’.

2.5 The new duties under the Children (Leaving Care) Act are not retrospective and therefore a number of Hertfordshire County Council’s care leavers who left care before 1st October 2001 and are not living with someone who has parental responsibility for them, could potentially be denied the benefits of the Act. Hertfordshire County Council will use its powers under Section 24 of the Children Act 1989 as amended by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 to support them, where appropriate.

2.6 Hertfordshire County Council recognises the need for all young people to mature and become independent of those who provide parental care. It acknowledges however that young people mature at different rates, and will be ready to move on to semi-independent or independent living at different times according to their maturity and circumstances. Hertfordshire County Council is committed to “looking after” children and young people until they

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are 18 years old, including those young people who have moved on to semi-independent accommodation. Arbitrary dates for moving on, based on dates of birth, will not be used, but moving on dates will be agreed with the young person based on their needs and wishes.

- 2.7 Planning will take place jointly with young people, and where possible and appropriate, with their families (including wider family); using tools such as Viewpoint.
- 2.8 Preparation for leaving care and planning for further education, training or employment must be considered in conjunction with all partner agencies
 - Housing authorities and associations
 - Health
 - Specific voluntary organisations
 - Education providers – schools, colleges and universities
 - Training providers
 - Employers
 - Other local authorities, where appropriate
- 2.9 All young people who cease to have accommodation provided directly by Hertfordshire County Council and move to living independently aged 16+, whether they continue to be looked after or not, will have a designated Personal Adviser and a pathway plan.
- 2.10 Hertfordshire County Council will keep in touch with relevant and former relevant children and will continue to provide assistance to achieve the goals agreed and set out in the pathway plan. The County Council will be sensitive to the needs and wishes of the individual young person. It is recognised that some young people leaving care will reject help initially, but will need or wish to return for help at a later stage, before they are 21, and this will be offered to them, even if there has been a period of non-contact. The County Council will persevere with keeping in touch even if the young person seems to be unresponsive or does not wish that contact be face to face.
- 2.11 Each young person aged 16 or over who is looked after or ceases to be looked after will be provided with comprehensive information about services available to them.
- 2.12 All young people who are looked after or cease to be looked after will be informed of the procedure for registering a comment or complaint and making representations and enabled to access independent advocacy.
- 2.13 Hertfordshire County Council will work with other local authorities to ensure that care leavers who leave or enter Hertfordshire are not disadvantaged. Hertfordshire County Council will offer support to care leavers who move to Hertfordshire from outside the county, and recharge only direct costs to their responsible authority.

3. Education and Training

- 3.1 **The preparation and planning for education and training for care leavers will reflect their aspirations and abilities and be aimed at increasing their life chances in adulthood. All care leavers will be supported through at least one course of further education of their choice.**
- 3.2 Well before a young person leaves care their personal education plan should reflect their aspirations and abilities. The planning for their transition to leaving care will take account of the lengthy process of transition from childhood to adulthood, to reflect the gradual transition of a young person from dependence to independence.
- 3.3 Young people will be fully involved in discussions and plans for their future education, training and employment and be given advice and information that will enable them to make informed choices.
- 3.4 We will endeavour to ensure that young people have stable placements that are supportive of their studies. Young people will not be moved in a period running up to or during examinations, except in an emergency.
- 3.5 Young people who are disabled will not be discriminated against in their access to education and associated services. Disability should not be a barrier to access further education, training or employment.
- 3.6 Hertfordshire County Council will ensure that young people leaving care have:
- Equality of opportunity to participate in education, training or employment as compared to other young people in the County
 - People around them who have high aspirations for each young person and who will help them realise their educational potential
 - The opportunity to make safe, caring and continuing relationships with carers/personal advisers
 - At least one person who will champion their education and wellbeing, promote achievement and challenge instances of less favourable or different treatment
 - No barriers to funding and support for appropriate further and higher education and training opportunities providing they are agreed in their Pathway Plan
 - Flexibility about date of commencement of courses, which can be deferred until the young person is ready
 - Where appropriate, the opportunity to pursue courses of study from home with the necessary resources to do so
 - Advice and support to access all benefits and student awards for which they are eligible

- Support if they live outside Hertfordshire when they are studying, training or working

3.7 Costs will be met in full for:

- Registration fees;
- Course fees;
- Examination fees;
- Specified course equipment and tools;
- Text books specified as essential;
- Activities required to meet curriculum;
- Public transport (or alternative where this is not possible) between accommodation and course centre;
- Specified clothing;

3.8 **Connexions**

Hertfordshire County Council will work closely with the Connexions Service, which offers information, advice, guidance and support to help all 13-19 years olds achieve their potential. Connexions Personal Advisors work with all young people but prioritise children in public care, helping young people to review their strengths and weaknesses and overcome barriers to learning.

- 3.9 Connexions Personal Advisers are trained to help young people make decisions about jobs, training, college or university, and can also give them information and advice about activities outside school. Connexions Personal Advisors will also make sure care leavers have the help they need to make a successful move to independence by linking with the Hertfordshire Leaving Care Team and CSF teams.

3.10 **Schools**

Hertfordshire County Council will encourage care leavers to fulfill their educational potential and to study in school beyond the statutory school leaving age. Hertfordshire County Council will work with schools to ensure that there are no barriers to continued study in school.

Hertfordshire County Council will train and support designated teachers in every school to support and advocate on behalf of the care leaver within the school setting, including those who are staying on to 6th form.

3.11 **Colleges of further and higher education**

Hertfordshire County Council will encourage wider participation in further and higher education by care leavers. Hertfordshire County Council will develop partnership agreements with colleges of further and higher education in order to ensure access to and completion of education courses by care leavers.

Hertfordshire County Council will ensure that there are no barriers to funding and support for appropriate education opportunities in higher and further education as agreed in their Pathway Plan.

3.12 Training providers

Hertfordshire County Council will encourage the development of partnership agreements with training providers in order to ensure access to and completion of training programmes by care leavers.

4. Employment

4.1 We will improve young people's opportunities for entering the world of employment by providing work experience placements and ensuring that all care leavers have at least one supported transition into employment of their choice.

4.2 We will give young people advice and support in seeking and sustaining employment, recognising that it may take time for them to find the career to which they are best suited. This will include helping them to access alternative programmes that prepare them for work in a supportive environment. We will also develop agreements with local employers to offer employment opportunities to care leavers.

4.3 Teenagers to Work Scheme

Through the Teenager to Work scheme Hertfordshire County Council will provide placements that

- reflect the young persons individual abilities, interests and aspirations
- are used creatively to increase the young persons employability skills
- develop confidence, skill and motivation
- promote the idea that young person can benefit from work experience placements within and external to the authority
- raise awareness of the authority of their potential as employers of young people who are care leavers.

4.4 Costs will be met in full for:

- Specified clothing/uniform;
- Start up equipment;
- Health and safety equipment;
- Public transport from accommodation to employment until receipt of first earnings;

5. Accommodation

5.1 Young people who have left care are over-represented amongst young homeless people, including those who are sleeping rough. They are also particularly vulnerable to exploitation by unsuitable adults or peers.

All care leavers will be supported to live in accommodation commensurate with their assessed need. We will ensure that all care

leavers move into suitable and safe accommodation and we will actively work with them to prevent them becoming homeless.

- 5.2 We will continue to develop and have available a wide range of accommodation, so that young people are not placed in accommodation that does not respond to their needs. We will ensure the suitability and security of accommodation and its providers, and ensure that care leavers are not placed alongside people who are unsuitable or potentially unsafe.
- 5.3 We will ensure that there are staged moves to independent living with the ability to fall back on more supportive accommodation arrangements should this prove necessary. We will work closely with care leavers and housing providers to tackle problems at an early stage and pre-empt the risk of eviction.
- 5.4 Hertfordshire County Council will work with the ten District Council Housing Departments on: -
- The promotion of the availability of secure tenancies from housing stock for care leavers
 - Access to deposit guarantee and rent in advance schemes
 - Agreed systems for referral and joint assessment procedures
 - Development, with housing associations, of a range of accommodation options for care leavers including those with a disability
 - Ensuring that care leavers are not placed in accommodation or areas that will put them at risk or increase the likelihood of their exploitation by unsuitable people.
- 5.5 Costs will be met in full for:
- 365 days rent or lease of accommodation for care leavers who are not in full time employment and who cannot access housing benefit;
 - Any accommodation supplied by a Registered Social Landlord, voluntary organisation or district council where housing benefit can not be claimed;
 - Where there is choice of private accommodation, the help will be based on assessed need, using the local mid-range cost as a guide;
 - Care element in supported accommodation if not met by housing benefit;
 - Rent guarantee;
 - Minimum advance rent/lease;
 - Furnishing to ensure sleep, warmth, preparation of food, care of clothing and personal safety.

6. Personal Support

- 6.1 **All care leavers will be supported to enable them to maintain their health and development and to take part in their community. All care leavers will be provided with a Personal Adviser who will provide the emotional and practical support they require to meet their needs.**

6.2 All care leavers aged 16 and over, whether they continue to be looked after or not, will have a designated Personal Adviser up to the age of 21, or beyond if in an agreed course of education or training. Disabled young people can have a personal adviser up to their 25th birthday if required. The Personal Adviser will provide emotional and practical support and draw up the Pathway Plan with the young person and the agencies involved with them, and ensure that it is carried out. They will give the young person the support and advice they require to meet their needs and, as far as possible, ensure that they are keeping safe and well.

6.3 **Practical Living Skills**

All care leavers will be provided with support both before and after they leave care in learning practical independence skills, such as cooking, decorating, and driving, to help them cope with the day to day activities of adult life.

6.4 **Health**

Historically young people who are looked after have had high levels of early parenthood, mental illness, stress, loneliness and incidence of risk-taking behaviour. There is an important health promotion and health advisory role for the health services, working in conjunction with the County Council, in supporting care leavers as they move to independence.

6.5 Hertfordshire County Council will:

- facilitate the development of care leavers' understanding of their own health needs and how to meet them.
- ensure that all care leavers are enabled to register with a doctor and a dentist.
- will fund a nurse to work with care leavers and develop and implement initiatives with Health and other partner agencies that will improve and sustain the physical and mental health of care leavers
- will develop policies and practices to promote healthy living for care leavers in conjunction with care leavers, Hertfordshire Leaving Care Team and Health agencies.

6.6 **Sports, Arts, Leisure and Culture**

Hertfordshire County Council will enhance the physical and mental health of care leavers by enabling them to develop sporting and artistic skills and to participate in other leisure and cultural activities

6.7 **Financial Support**

Care leavers will be given advice and support on budgeting and managing their own finances to help ensure that they do not get into financial difficulties and risk incurring penalties and sanctions that will jeopardise their life chances. Control of their own finances will be handed over to care leavers incrementally, depending upon their maturity and independence.

- 6.8 In carrying out its duties in relation to financial provision for care leavers Hertfordshire County Council will ensure that:
- The financial system will not provide any incentive for young people to leave care prematurely
 - Payment structures will reward placement stability, education and training
 - Payment systems will link with existing national income maintenance systems i.e. JSA, New Deal, Income Support, Housing Benefit
 - The financial system will not disadvantage young people when they reach eighteen years of age
 - The financial system will be sensitive to the specific needs of disabled young people and those from black and ethnic backgrounds
 - Young people will have increasing control of their personal finance prior to leaving care
 - The financial system will avoid socially excluding young people and provide them with the opportunities afforded to their peers
 - Financial support will take into account benefits, student loans and grants, and earnings of care leavers in full time employment
- 6.9 Costs will be met in full for:
- A personal allowance for day to day expenses that at least matches benefits for young people aged 16-17;
 - Therapy for assessed need;
 - 1 public sector leisure card per annum;
 - Contact with family based on assessed need;
 - Eye and dental treatment as prescribed (where there is no entitlement to help under the 'low-income' scheme);
 - Annual prescription season ticket;
 - A programme of driving lessons agreed in the Pathway Plan.
- 6.10 **Young Offenders**
- A minority of young people who are being or have been looked after will have committed criminal offences. These young people may be subject to the supervision of a Youth Offending Team. The Youth Offending Team will work to ensure as far as possible that these young people do not re-offend.
- 6.11 We will develop and implement arrangements that will reduce the number of children in public care and care leavers who receive a 'final warning' or who are convicted of a criminal offence including:
- Residential children's homes and Young Citizen's Programme will implement established programmes to divert young people from crime
 - Each Looked After Young Person who receives a reprimand from the police will be referred to the Young Citizen's Programme for assessment and intervention

6.12 Hertfordshire County Council will ensure that for looked after children and care leavers in custody planning and preparation is carried out in advance of their discharge date, and that they are supported once they have left custody.

6.13 **Care Leavers who are parents**

Young people who are also parents will have services offered to them as care leavers in their own right, as well as any support or interventions related to their children.

7. Review of the Policy

This policy will be reviewed every three years by or on behalf of the designated officer for after care who is the Assistant Director with responsibility for Operations. This review will include consultation with young people who have previously ceased to be looked after by Hertfordshire County Council.

References

The Children Act 1989

Department of Health Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 – Regulations and Guidance

Department of Health Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 – Getting it right

Department of Health/Department of Education & Employment Joint Guidance on the Education of Children and Young People in Public Care 2000

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001

Hertfordshire County Council Policy on the Education of Children and Young People in Public Care 2001

Report to Hertfordshire County Council Corporate Parenting Panel 12 December 2001

Children, Schools and Families Service Plan 2002-2003

Quality Protects MAP4 2002

Guidance on the implementation of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 – Trent and Eastern Region