



Please provide:

1. A copy of the local authority's 'local offer' to care leavers that was in place on 1 October 2024 [Care leavers local offer](#)
2. A copy of the local authority's financial policy as related to care leavers that was in place on 1 October 2024, and as the local authority are required to have in accordance with statutory guidance. [See attached](#)
3. A copy of any current local authority practice guidance, management guidance, protocols, processes, strategies or plans associated with supporting care leavers to engage with higher education or attend university [There is no separate policy or guidance specifically about Higher Education, apart from the Care Leavers Offer.](#)
4. A copy of the local authority's last self-assessment submitted to an annual engagement meeting with Ofsted or an Ofsted standard or short inspection, whichever was most recent. Please do not provide a copy of the self-assessment submitted to any focused or monitoring visit. [Disclosure of the self assessment would have a negative impact on recruitment and retention of staff and would therefore prejudice the commercial interests of the Council. It is therefore exempt from disclosure under section 43\(2\) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 \(the Act\). This exemption is subject to a public interest test. Whilst the Council recognises the presumption of disclosure in the Act and the need to be transparent in Council activities, the public interest in protecting the Council's budgetary position and ability to deliver an effective service with stable staffing, i.e. its commercial interests, in this case outweighs the benefits of disclosure of a document that is only one part of the annual engagement.](#)
5. The total number of care leavers aged 18-25 eligible for support by your local authority effective 1 October 2024 (or if data is not available effective that date, the number today). For clarity, this and 6, 7 and 8 below should include both 'former relevant' and 'qualifying' care leavers [557](#)

6. The number of care leavers aged 18-25 in your local authority that were engaged in higher education study effective 1 October 2024 (or if data is not available effective that date, the number today) to include whether the course is:
- a. undergraduate
 - b. or postgraduate
 - c. other
- (if a breakdown is not available of the type of course, please provide the total number in higher education study)
7. The total number of care leavers aged 18-25 eligible for support by your local authority effective the date of the last SSSDA903 return.
8. The number of care leavers aged 18-25 in your local authority that were engaged in higher education study effective the date of the last SSSDA903 return.

20 (breakdown not available).

466

23 (breakdown not available)



Introduction

In Wigan, we know that Care Leavers may require support with transition into adulthood and we want to ensure that this is a positive experience. The Local Authority acts as your 'Corporate Parent'. We want to offer you support and care as any parent would. This is to ensure we help you reach your full potential in adulthood.

This policy outlines the financial support we will provide to you as a Care Leaver.

The policy has been developed in accordance with:

- The Children's Act 1989
- The Children Leaving Care Act 2000
- The Children Act 2004
- Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers
- Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010
- The Children and Social Work Act 2017

The policy will support you with key areas of your life such as:

- Accommodation
- Setting up your home
- Education, training and employment
- Providing you with support to celebrate key events in your life (your birthday, Christmas or other religious events)
- Support to keeping up with your hobbies
- Getting your identification documents
- Learning to drive
- Allowances for essential items such as clothing
- Emergency support
- Ensuring your health needs are met

All the above support will be recorded within your Pathway Plan that will be completed by you and your Personal Adviser. Your Pathway Plan will be reviewed every 6 months or if a significant event occurs. If you have returned to live with somebody who holds parental responsibility for you for 6 months or more, you may not be entitled to financial support.

The law sets out different categories of Care Leavers, we will explain the different categories and the entitlements below.

1. Definition of Who Is Eligible For Support

The extent of our financial responsibility towards you as a Care Leaver will be determined according to which Care Leaver category you fall into (as defined by The Children Leaving Care Act 2000).

Eligible Young Person

You are an Eligible Care Leaver if:

- you are currently looked after; and
- aged 16 or 17; and
- you have been looked after for a period of 13 weeks (or periods amounting to 13 weeks) which began after you reached 14 and ended after you reached 16

Relevant Young Person

You are a Relevant Care Leaver if:

- you are no longer looked after by the Local Authority but you have been 'Eligible'; and
- are aged 16 or 17 years old;
- You were 'Eligible' immediately before being detained or in hospital;
- or lived for continuous period of 6 months or more with a parent, someone with parental responsibility and where those arrangements break down.

Former Relevant Young Person

You are a Former Relevant Care Leaver if:

- if you are aged 18 years or above; and
- have been either a Relevant or Eligible child when under 18

If at the age of 21 or before reaching the age of 25 you are in education or training, then you will remain a former relevant child until the end of the agreed programme.

Qualifying Young Person

You are a Qualifying Care Leaver if:

- You are aged between 16-21 (or 25 if you are in further education or training)
- You were looked-after by Children's Services for a period of time between your 16th and 18th birthday.
- You were subject to a Special Guardianship Order or if age 18 was subject to an SGO (and was looked after immediately prior to the making of the Order)
- You were ceased to be looked after and returned to, or remained living with a parent or person who has parental responsibility and after completing 6 months at home.

- You were looked after at any point after the age of 16 and is no longer looked after (minimum of 24 hours)
- You were looked after at any point after the age of 16 but has not completed 13 weeks of being looked after and is therefore not an 'eligible Care Leaver'

2. Allowances

If you are an Eligible young person living in semi-independence or independently you will continue to receive £25 Birthday and Christmas/religious celebration allowances.

If you are a Relevant or Former Relevant young person you will receive your 18th Birthday allowance and Christmas/religious celebration allowance once after your 18th Birthday. You will also receive Birthday allowance on your 21st Birthday.

A child's savings ISA account may have been created for you when you were in care, your Personal Advisor can help you find out about this.

3. Leisure

As specified in your Pathway Plan, financial support may also be available to assist you with:

- The cost of maintaining contact with your family and significant others.

The exact amount of financial support will need to be agreed by your Personal Adviser and detailed in your Pathway Plan. You may also be expected to contribute towards the cost yourself and assume increasing responsibility for this, the older you get.

If you are an Eligible, Relevant or Former Relevant young person you will be entitled to receive a gym membership from a Local Authority leisure facility, which also allows access to swimming pools and exercise classes.

If there is any reason you are not able to attend a Local Authority gym, speak to your Personal Adviser, and they will make a request to the Leaving Care Team Manager to use an alternative leisure facility. If you are not using this membership, the local authority will review it and may withdraw the membership.

5. Education, Employment and Training

If you are an Eligible, Relevant or Former Relevant young person you will be supported to pursue education, training or employment. The LA will provide £666 per year to support you in Higher Education. It is expected that transport, meals, books and equipment costs will be met from this bursary. You will also be assisted to apply for a bursary for any further education, college or training provider.

You are also entitled to access the [Bee Photocard for Care Leavers](#). This is a travelcard, giving you free travel on most [Greater Manchester buses](#) up to your 21st birthday.

Limited financial support may also be available in respect of the purchase of educational materials such as: equipment, specific clothing and transport where such support is not available from other sources. In addition, a bursary may be available towards the cost of the course. The level of financial support will be discussed and agreed as part of your Pathway Plan and would cover 'reasonable' costs.

If you are an Eligible young person living in semi-independence or independently; or a Relevant/Former Relevant young person living independently and you require financial support to attend a job/training/education interview, the Local Authority will support you to access/purchase interview clothing or a discretionary amount to support with travel costs.

6. Accommodation, Finances/Benefits

As your Corporate Parent, we will fund the cost of appropriate accommodation for you up to the age of 18 years if you are an Eligible Care Leaver. If you are earning an income, or are in receipt of means tested benefits, you will be expected to contribute towards your accommodation and maintenance. This will be discussed and agreed as part of your Pathway Plan.

If you are an Eligible young person and you are living in a semi-independent placement or independently, we will provide you with a maintenance allowance each week that is equivalent to the current Universal Credit rate (minus any uplift). You may receive this from your semi-independent placement or from the Leaving Care Team. If you are awaiting to receive your benefits, we will support you with the above amount until your benefits are in place. You must show evidence that you have applied for the appropriate benefits.

Once you reach the age of 18 you can claim the same range of benefits as other adults. If you are a Former Relevant young person, you will be advised regarding claims for your housing benefit and will be responsible for your own rent and household bills. We strongly advise that any housing benefit you receive is paid directly to your accommodation provider. Support will be given to you to apply for suitable housing to meet your needs. You may be eligible to continue to reside with your foster carer/s beyond the age of 18 in accordance with the Local Authority's Staying Put Policy.

Financial support may be available to you in respect of accommodation costs for rental properties. We can support you with a deposit or rent guarantor required for private rented properties through our Deposit Assistance Scheme, find further information within the [Care Leavers Local Offer](#). Any deposit or bond would need to be agreed in your Pathway Plan and you would need to evidence why this is the most appropriate accommodation for you and the deposit is not available from other sources.

7. Health

Your Personal Advisor will support you to ensure that you are in receipt of the correct benefits relating to any health needs or disability such as Personal

Independence Payments (PIP). These support needs will be identified as part of your Pathway Plan.

If you are an eligible Care Leaver, you will be entitled to free prescriptions until your 25th birthday.

8. Council Tax

If you are a Care Leaver between the age 18-25 living in the Wigan borough, you do not need to pay for Council Tax. Your Personal Advisor will support you with this.

If you are living outside of the Wigan borough, your Personal Advisor will support you to make a request to the specific Local Authority to establish if you have entitlements under their discretionary discount policy.

9. Identification

If you are an Eligible, Relevant, Former Relevant young person The Local Authority will fund the following forms of identification:

- Passport that is valid for 10 years from the age of 18 years.
- A birth certificate.
- A driving licence.
- A deed poll certificate if required.

10. Driving

We will assist you with motor vehicle lessons subject to the following criteria:

- You must be at least 17 years of age.
- Your motor vehicle lessons will be delivered through a registered and legitimate driving instructor. You can choose your own instructor, or one can be arranged by the Local Authority.
- You will receive a provisional driving license.
- You will receive 10 lessons. Any lessons after this amount will be self-funded.

11. Financial Assistance To You As A Qualifying Young Person

The primary financial support role for you as a Qualifying young person is the responsibility of the Department for Work and Pensions. In exceptional circumstances the Local Authority may provide financial assistance where this is deemed necessary to protect your welfare and where it cannot be made available by any other agency.

As a Qualifying Care Leaver, you are entitled to support for accommodation during your college or university holidays if you are studying full-time away from home, up to the age of 25, (where you are not eligible to claim relevant benefits or is not in receipt of any other source of income).

12. Setting Up Home Grant

If you are an Eligible, Relevant or a Former Relevant young person you will receive an allowance of £3,000 to assist you in setting up your own home. The grant is provided to ensure your household items are obtained such as furniture and white goods.

If you are open to the Leaving Care Team, we can liaise with a local company to source a package of white goods at a reduced cost for you, (this includes washing machine, fridge freezer and cooker).

When you have a tenancy with us, we will ensure that the property is decorated throughout, and this will include carpets and curtains or blinds. We will automatically refer you for Tenancy Support and offer you training on what it means to be a tenant.

How you receive the Setting Up Home Grant will be documented in your Pathway Plan.

Please note – this a ‘setting up home’ allowance, not a ‘leaving care grant’. Therefore, it can be saved until needed at any point whilst you are a Care Leaver as identified above.

We will also provide you with internet Wi-Fi for the first 12 months of moving into your first home and a TV license.

13. If You Are A Former Relevant Young Person Attending Higher Education

Accommodation

If you are a Former Relevant young person you are entitled to financial assistance (based on relevant halls of residence / local rented accommodation rates, whichever is less) to subsidise your accommodation costs whilst attending your place of higher education. Evidence will be required from your place of study that you are engaging with your course.

This support will be provided for the planned duration of the course, not exceeding three years. Funding for a fourth year will only be agreed in

exceptional circumstances following consultation with your place of study and the reasons why an extra year of funding is approved will be clearly outlined in your Pathway Plan.

You also have access to, and will be expected to apply for, student loans along with any other young person in full-time higher education.

Bursaries

If you are a Former Relevant young person attending a course of higher education that is at least two academic years in duration and fits the criteria set out within the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998 (4), Wigan Local Authority will pay you a bursary. Arrangements for paying the bursary will be agreed and set out within your Pathway Plan. The bursary entitlement is £2,000 to cover the entire duration of your course and will be paid in equal instalments annually. You will only be entitled to one bursary and this is to help with purchasing books and equipment.

For the purposes of clarity – higher education is classed as study at Level 4 and above.

If you do not have access to a computer through your higher education provider (or you do not have your own), one will be provided to you (up to the value of £250).

We will also support you to apply for 'Vulnerable young persons bursary' that all universities offer.

How and Who Will Fund Your Accommodation During University Holidays

Financial support will be provided for accommodation for you if you are in Higher Education up to the age of 25. We will either fund your accommodation for the full academic year.

We will only assist in contributing to the cost of one type of accommodation during this time (i.e. rent will not be paid for both higher education accommodation and accommodation elsewhere). Your Personal Advisor will confirm that you are attending higher education. Proof of your attendance must be obtained from the you or your education provision e.g. attendance records.

14. Apprenticeships

If you require special equipment for your traineeship/apprenticeship, the provider should be approached in the first instance. If equipment is not provided your Personal Advisor will seek a decision from the Leaving Care Team Manager for the equipment request.

15. Emergency Assistance

The Local Authority may also provide you with emergency funds to assist in exceptional circumstances where this is deemed necessary. Such assistance will only be made available when other possibilities have been considered and where you have taken all reasonable steps to remedy the situation. Advice and guidance will be available to you to ensure you do not become reliant on emergency assistance. You will need to agree to your Personal Adviser liaising with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and/or other agencies as necessary to be approved for emergency funding.

Assistance may be given in the form of vouchers or food parcels or signposting you to voluntary organisations / charities that can provide help. At the Care Leavers Hub, we have a food and toiletries pantry that is accessible to you.

16. Care leavers 18 Years and Over

Financial responsibility for care leavers not in employment at age 18 rests with the DWP. Care leavers are eligible for several means tested and welfare benefits via Job Centre Plus. This applies whether the young person has remained in foster care or is living in supported or independent accommodation. Care Leavers can claim Income Support and Housing Benefit whilst in further education from their 18th birthday until the end of the academic year in which they are 21. If not in further education, Universal Credit will apply.

Your Personal Advisor will help you to make your claims in a timely manner and to maximise your income from these sources whilst at the same time supporting you to seek employment or training. All Benefits can be claimed in advance prior to your 18th birthday. Your Personal Advisor should make the application 8 weeks in advance of your 18th birthday.

17. Care Leavers in Custody

Young people in custody will generally be paid £20 per month as well as sending you a birthday allowance. We will also help you with clothing upon request.

18. Separated Young People (Unaccompanied asylum seeker)

If you are a separated young person, we will ensure you have the Travel Documents you need.

We will ensure you have the following:

- Hygiene pack - shampoo, conditioner, toothbrush, toothpaste, mouth wash, shower gel, deodorant
- A food pack of basic essentials including pasta, rice, oil, bread, sugar, tea/coffee, eggs, fruit/veg, tinned goods, items from your own country that you will be used to eating
- Faith pack - Quran/bible, prayer beads, prayer mat, religious clothing, water jug

Immigration status for Separated Young People

From the age of 18 years, if you are a former Relevant Young Person who has been granted leave to remain in the UK, you can claim means tested benefits and have rights to access public housing. This includes cases where your leave to remain has expired but you have applied for an extension of leave to remain (provided the application was made before the previous period of leave expired) and that application is still under consideration, or an appeal against refusal of the extension has been made.

If you are "unlawfully present in the UK" - which includes being refused asylum or you have either not applied for an extension of further Discretionary Leave to remain or have applied for an extension but that application and any appeal has been rejected, you can generally only be supported to the extent necessary to avoid a breach of your human rights (under the European Convention of Human Rights).

Therefore, a Human Rights Assessment should be arranged with Adult Care Services to ascertain if Leaving Care support should continue.

Examples that could demonstrate that support should continue for human rights reasons might be:

- You are taking all reasonable steps to leave the UK but is unable to do so immediately e.g. because you are waiting for the required travel documents from the national embassy;
- You are temporarily unable to leave the UK because you are too sick to travel;
- You are waiting for the outcome of judicial review proceedings in the higher courts in relation to your asylum claim.

19. Complaints

If you are not happy with the financial support offered to you, you should attempt to resolve the disagreement through your Social Worker/Personal Advisor or the Leaving Care Team Manager.

If the complaint cannot be resolved in this way then you can make a formal complaint via the Local Authority's Complaints Team via [online form](#).

You can also express your views, wishes and feeling through advocacy via [Wigan Family Welfare](#) Tel: 01942 867 888 Email: admin@familywelfare.co.uk

Rachael Burke

Service Manager, Children in Care/Care Leavers

September 2024 *Policy to be reviewed annually.*

Appendix A

Care Leaver Guide To Financial Support in Wigan

Description	Amount	I am an Eligible Care Leaver.	I am a Relevant Care Leaver	I am a Former Relevant Care Leaver	I am a Qualifying Care Leaver
Allowances					
Maintenance allowance as I am living independently or in semi independence (equivalent to Job Seekers Allowance rate for a single person under the age of 25).	Current UC level (minus any uplift)	✓	✓	✓	
I am in an emergency and my safety/welfare is going to be affected.	Discretionary support.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Birthday allowance if I am living in semi-independence or independently.	£25 per year from age 18 to 21.	✓	✓	✓	
Christmas allowance or another other religious celebration allowance if I am living in semi-independence or independently.	£25 per year from age 18 to 21.	✓	✓	✓	
Setting up home allowance when I am living independently.	£3000.00	✓	✓	✓	

Accommodation					
I am not able to access social housing and I need support with a deposit/bond and/or advanced rent payment. This has been agreed by the Local Authority	Discretionary amount	✓	✓	✓	
Council Tax Discount if I am a Care Leaver between age 18-25.	Stipulated by the Local Authority.	✓	✓	✓	
I live with my foster carer, semi-independent placement or in a residential home. The Local Authority funds my home.	Amount agreed through commissioning department.	✓			
Leisure					
A leisure pass for me to attend a Local Authority gym or another gym where agreed by the Team Manager until aged 21.	Dictated by the leisure facility	✓	✓	✓	
Education/Employment/Training					
GM Travel pass	Dictated TfGM	✓	✓	✓	
Health					
You will receive free prescriptions	Dictated by NHS	✓	✓	✓	
You will be supported to attend health appointments	Discretionary	✓	✓	✓	
Identification					
Passport	Current 10 Year passport cost		✓	✓	
Driving License	Current driving licence cost	✓	✓	✓	

Deed Poll certificate if appropriate.	Current deed poll cost applicable to your circumstances.	✓	✓	✓	
<i>Driving</i>					
I am age 17 and meet the criteria for 10 funded driving lessons.	Amount stipulated by approved provider.	✓	✓	✓	
Support You In Higher Education					
Accommodation costs (equivalent to the basic halls of residence cost at the university to be attended)	£5000		✓	✓	
Bursary (paid in instalments over the duration of the course) – level 4 and above for a minimum course duration of 2 years.	£2000		✓	✓	
Laptop computer if I am living in semi-independence or independently in higher education and I cannot access one elsewhere	£250		✓	✓	
University holiday accommodation if I am not receiving financial support for any other accommodation.	My university accommodation will be paid for the academic year		✓	✓	✓

Notes:

Financial assistance in relation to higher education as set out above will be paid where funding from other sources e.g. the educational establishment, is not available.

Financial assistance will only be made available subject to provision of receipts/proof of expenditure.

Financial assistance will be monitored and reviewed through your Pathway Plan.