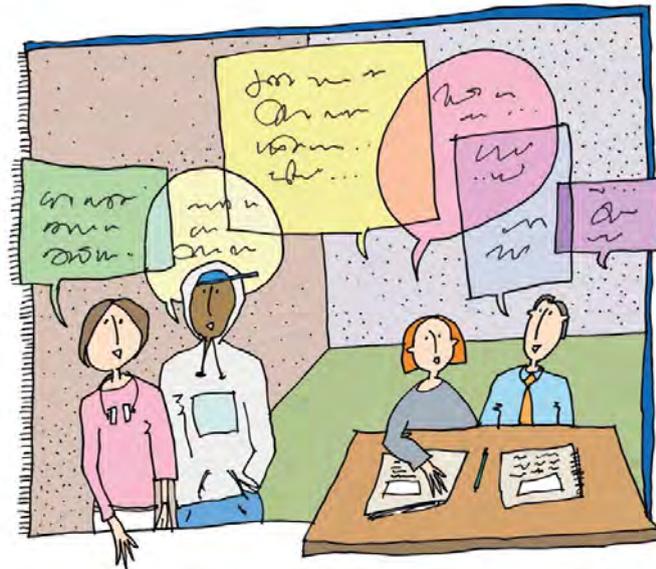


Gloucestershire County Council

# Care Leavers Strategy



# Foreword

## From Cllr Boyles, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet member for Children's Safeguarding and Early Years

As corporate parents we are committed to



expanding our offer to the care experienced young people and adults of our county. It is important that experiences of transition to adulthood are positive and that all young people have the necessary support, life-skills, experience and resilience to

enable them to thrive as adults in our community.

As the cabinet member for children and young people I place utmost importance on hearing what our young people have to say. They have told us that they want to feel safe and supported. We want to ensure this is the case by providing the highest quality services that meet their needs as they make the transition to adulthood.

I believe this strategy provides the clarity on our ambition to ensure every care leaver has the opportunity to go from strength to strength in whatever goal they are striving to achieve.

## From Callie, 18 year old Gloucestershire ambassador and care leaver



I have been an ambassador for Gloucestershire County Council for the past 2 years and it's been great to feel involved with decision making. Today I was on an interview panel to recruit workers and it

mattered whether I thought they would go out into the world and deliver good practice. The support I got from workers means I am going off to university next week. With all the stress of leaving care it really helps that Gloucestershire have introduced the E-wallet card to financially support young people. It gives instant access to money without having to go round the houses and chase different professionals. I think all young people would like more contact with workers, not just in the home but out and about in the county. I hope this strategy helps make even more improvements to the way young people are supported.

# Introduction

## Our commitment to care leavers

The 2019-2022 Gloucestershire Looking to the Future Strategy<sup>1</sup> sets out a commitment to: “Do everything we can to make sure children in care and care leavers get the best possible opportunities to grow up healthy, stay safe and do well in education and work by improving the stability, availability, quality and variety of placements and by strengthening our offer for care leavers.”

### Sufficiency Strategy

Our 2018-21 Right Placement First Time Sufficiency Strategy commits to develop and commission a platform of accommodation options for our care experienced young people and adults. The strategy was developed in consultation with our young people and really reflects their needs.



The Sufficiency Strategy pledged to expand “Staying Put” for young people in foster care and offer “Staying Close” arrangements to young people in residential homes post 18. The number of young people in a staying put arrangement has steadily increased over recent years going from 25 in 2017 to 38 in May 2019<sup>2</sup>.

### Corporate Parents and our pledge to care leavers

In Gloucestershire, a Corporate Parent Group (CPG) chaired by the lead Cabinet Member for Children and Families ensures that our duty as Corporate Parents to our children in care and care leavers is upheld.

Corporate parents follow seven principles:

- 1] To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of children and young people.
- 2] To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
- 3] To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
- 4] To help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
- 5] To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.
- 6] For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
- 7] To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

More detail on our expectations of corporate parents in Gloucestershire can be found at [https://gloucestershirechildcare.proceduresonline.com/p\\_leaving\\_care.html#expectations](https://gloucestershirechildcare.proceduresonline.com/p_leaving_care.html#expectations)



<sup>1</sup> Looking to the Future <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/media/2083042/council-strategy-2019-3.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Annual snapshots of local data

# Care leavers voice

We place great importance on listening carefully to the views of our young people, recording them carefully and acting on them. All care leavers will be encouraged to speak up and voice opinions.

The Government's 2007 White Paper, 'Care Matters: Time for change', expects every local authority to put in place arrangements for a 'Children in Care Council', with direct links to the Director of Children's Services and Lead Member. This will give children in care a forum to express their views and influence the services and support they receive.

The Voice Gloucestershire model is a partnership between the Participation Team, and other operational teams across Children's Services working with Children in Care and Care Leavers.

The employment of 15 Ambassadors has proved really successful here in Gloucestershire and was noted as a strength by Ofsted. Many of our Ambassadors are care experienced young people who have been recruited and trained (at regular intervals throughout the year) by our Participation team. Ambassadors for Vulnerable Children and Young People help us to keep young people and children focused; they challenge us, work with us and often identify areas of our work that require further attention and development. They are creative, social media savvy and help us communicate



effectively with children and young people. They have impacted on our attitudes, understanding and awareness of the issues that are important to them. Ambassadors for Vulnerable Children and Young People are key to the success that the Children in Care Council has had on strategic planning, services and individuals. Ambassadors take a lead in supporting and reporting back on behalf of the council.

Here are some of the other ways we capture the voice of our care leavers here in Gloucestershire.

**The Coram Bright Spots national survey**  
We have used the Coram Bright Spots Survey to ensure we capture the views of those who perhaps don't feel able to partake in face to face consultations. In 2018 30% (89) care leavers in Gloucestershire responded to the Your Life Beyond Care survey. They told us how important it was for them to be involved in creating their pathway plans, to have a focus on budgeting skills within it and

being clear on exactly what they are entitled to. Since then we have worked with care leavers to develop and publish the Gloucestershire local offer (our care leavers planned and hosted their own celebration event to mark this occasion) and to develop a pathway planning tool that better meets their needs. Further surveys are to be conducted annually in order to compile benchmarking data and trend analysis.

**The Mind Of My Own app**  
We know that many young people find it difficult to talk to social workers and other professionals. We have embedded the Mind Of My Own app into our practices so that care leavers have a means of expressing their views and thoughts to their worker at any time. Feedback from those who have used it has been very positive. Care leavers have told us that by using the app they feel less worried or embarrassed about what they are saying in their statements.

**Our boards**  
We have ensured our care leavers are represented on our corporate parenting board. The LGA's Corporate Parenting Resource Pack Oct 2017<sup>3</sup> featured Gloucestershire as a local case study.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.local.gov.uk/corporate-parenting-resource-pack>

*‘Gloucestershire aims to put the voice of children and young people at the heart of its approach to corporate parenting, with children in care, young people with experience of children’s services and corporate parents working together on everything from strategic planning and service delivery to training and consultation’.*

### Consultation event and workshops

We often bring our care experienced young people together to help us shape our services to meet their needs. For example, 48 children in care and care leavers were engaged in the development of our Sufficiency Strategy and more recently a group of 12 care leavers supported us in developing a pathway planning tool to help young people understand and recognise their pathway plans.

### Advocacy

All care leavers can access an Independent Advocate to help inform them about their rights and ensure their voice is heard. We place great importance on ensuring our young people know how to complain and understand what has happened as a result of their complaint. To ensure complaints are treated seriously and responded to clearly we have an independent contracted provider (Barnardos).

They provide coordinated, personalised, and empowered services in relation to:

- Children’s social care complaints
- Children and young people subject to child protection,
- Children in Care and care leavers and privately fostered children.
- Advocacy for children and young people with disabilities, including non-instructed advocacy for those lacking capacity and SEND advocacy

Our adult advocacy provider (POhWER) works in partnership with Barnardos to ensure a smooth transition to adult services for those who have reached their 18th birthday. Where necessary the young person will receive dual advocacy until the point at which they are comfortable with their new advocate.

Those Care Leavers (aged 16-17) can also receive support from an Independent Visitor to exercise their rights and be involved in decisions that impact them. This support is currently provided by Change, Grow, Live.

### Aims

Having listened to the voices of children in care and care leavers in Gloucestershire we have developed the following priority

aims which we will focus on over the next two years. These are in line with the priorities outlined in the National Care Leaver Strategy (2013)<sup>4</sup> and the Department for Education Local Offer Guidance (2017)<sup>5</sup>.

- To support our care experienced young people and adults to reach their full potential through work, study or training.
- To help our care experienced young people and adults to find the right accommodation that is safe and suitable for them
- To support our care experienced young people and adults to maintain good physical and mental health
- To support our care experienced young people and adults to manage finances and sustain independent living arrangements
- To aid our care experienced young people and adults to feel connected, involved and heard within their local community

*“Every time I’ve asked him for help, whatever the situation, he was always by my side. He told me to keep my chin up, to smile, to show the world who I really am.”*

Care experienced young person referring to their leaving care worker

<sup>4</sup> National Care Leaver Strategy (2013) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-leaver-strategy>

<sup>5</sup> DfE Local Offer Guidance (2017) [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/683703/Local\\_offer\\_guidance\\_final.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683703/Local_offer_guidance_final.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Our voices, a film by careleaversforcareleavers

# The national context

Young people leaving care are one of the most vulnerable groups in our society. They face greater health problems, higher levels of unemployment and lower education attainment than their peers.

Both the government and wider society have a duty to support care leavers to transition to adulthood and thrive living independently. The statutory framework for children in care and leaving care is set out in the Children Act 1989 as amended by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and the Children and Young Persons Act 2008. The 2000 Act was introduced to clarify local authority duties regarding children leaving care and care leavers and tackle disparities in the range and quality of services available to them.

In 2013 the Government published a Care Leaver Strategy setting out the importance of providing care leavers with access to the same level of care and support that other young people get from their parent. Within this report the Government set out 7 areas for concern. They were Education, Employment, Financial Support, Health, Housing, Justice System and On-going support.

In 2016 this strategy was refreshed and the "Keep on Caring" report was published. Keep on Caring outlined the strategic plan proposed by



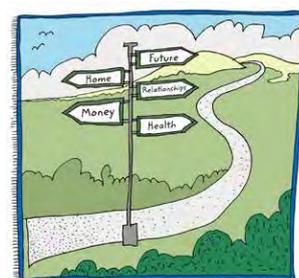
government to better support care leavers as they transition to adulthood. The role of government as corporate parents responsible for ensuring positive outcomes for young people was emphasized. The strategic plan focused on 5 key outcomes:

- All young people leaving care should be better prepared and supported to live independently.
- Improved access to employment, education and training.
- Care leavers should experience stability in their lives, and feel safe and secure.
- Improved access to health support.

- Care leavers should achieve financial stability.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 set out new duties for local authorities and partner agencies in relation to care leavers. It sets out the corporate parenting principles local authorities must uphold and includes the requirement to publish a Local Offer as well as:

- Offering Personal Adviser support to all care leavers (including those no longer in education or training) up to the age of 25 if they want this
- The right to be heard and taken seriously
- Accommodation if you leave care before turning 18
- The option to 'stay put' with your former foster carer
- Support to engage in education, employment or training



## Legislation and policies that impact care leavers

Legislation and policy that has influenced our work with care leavers, our ambition for care leavers and the development of this strategy include:

- Children Act (1989)
- Housing Act (1996)
- Children Leaving Care Act (2000)
- Mental Health Act (2007)
- Children and Young Person Act (2008)
- Care Leavers Strategy (2013)
- Working together to Safeguard Children (2013)
- Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation (2013)
- The Children and Families Act (2014)
- Care Act (2014)
- Future in mind (2015)
- Care Leavers Transition to Adulthood - National Audit Office (2015)
- Keep on Caring – Supporting young people from Care to Independence (2016)
- Ending Gang Violence and Exploitation (2016)
- In Care, Out of Trouble (2016)
- Children and Social Work Act (2017)
- Rough Sleeping Strategy (2018)

# The local context

We know that the care leaver cohort has been changing over recent years as more children are entering care at age 16 or over, and with more unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) entering the care system.

While the number of children in care having 3 or more placements during the year remained consistent for England and our statistical neighbours over the past 3 years (2016-18), in Gloucestershire this figure has fluctuated, rising from 9% in 2016, up to 14% in 2017 and then was reducing down to 11% in 2018.

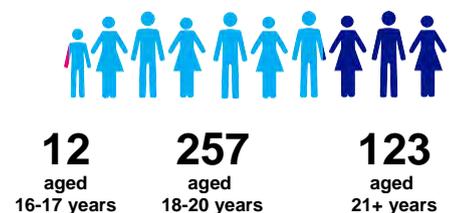
In terms of the proportion of children returning home after a period of being looked after this number has been in decline nationally since 2009. The same trajectory is reflected in the southwest and across our statistical neighbours. Here in Gloucestershire this figure has fluctuated in that same period but risen steadily for the last 3 years. This reflects our renewed commitment here in Gloucestershire to careful assessments of need and it evidences our focus on improvements to parenting capacity. As we embed our sufficiency strategy, with a focus on early intervention we continue to work to improve this figure over the coming year.

Given our current population of children in care and taking into account the extension of duties to age 25, we can predict that our cohort of care leavers will continue to grow over the next 3 years.

We recognise that some groups of care leavers will need additional support. These include unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC), teenage parents, young people with disabilities or additional health needs and young people leaving custody. We have embedded champions for each of these groups within our structure to ensure best practice and learning is shared. You can find our policies for these groups at <https://gloucestershirechildcare.proceduresonline.com>

## A recent Snapshot of Care Leavers taken in October 2019

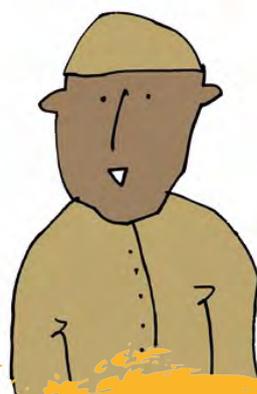
### Care Leavers by age



Our Leaving Care Service currently supports 392 care leavers, of whom 41 are UASC. All but 12 young people are aged 18 years or over.

80 care leavers are in education (21%), 129 in employment/apprenticeships or training (34%) and 25 are at University (7%). 170 or 45% are currently NEET. Of the NEET group, 81 are not available for education or training due to illness, disability or because they are pregnant or a parent.

35 young people are in Staying Put with the vast majority with our in house foster carers – this equates to around 13.5% of care leavers aged 18/19 & 20 years old.



Between the ages of 16 and 18 a Child in Care starts to make supported choices about their future, by age 18 they cease to be looked after and can choose whether to remain with foster placement guardians in a staying put arrangement. The number of children leaving care aged 16+ has remained fairly stable in Gloucestershire in the past 5 years and represents around a third of all children who have a period of care ending in each fiscal year.

to implement a service model whereby every young person preparing to leave care will be allocated a leaving care worker from the age of 16 years.

To ensure continuity of care, wherever possible, their social worker will remain the same and hold all statutory responsibility.

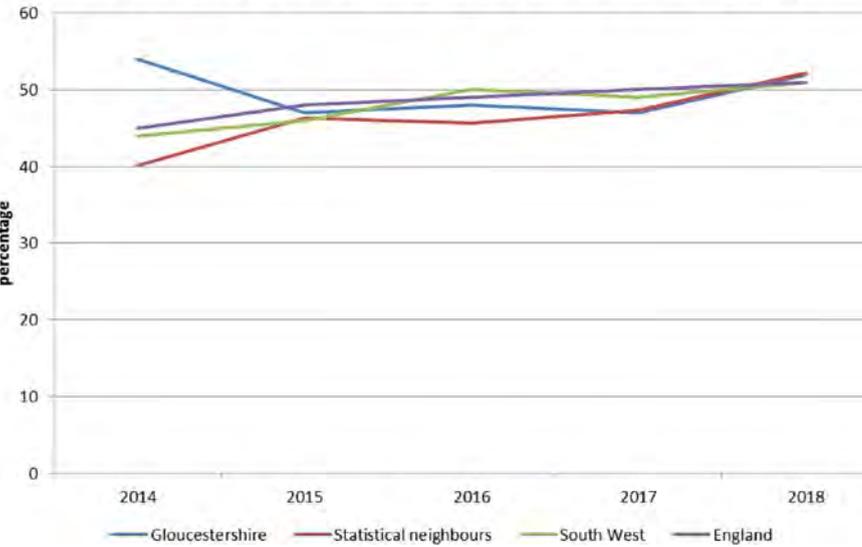
Following the end to formal education at age 18, young people will progress to higher education, employment or further training such as apprenticeships. Research indicates that care leavers are likely to experience delayed maturation<sup>8</sup> meaning they are less likely to make a smooth progression to education, training or employment. This often leads to adversity in adulthood.

**Number of children who had 1 or more period(s) of care closure in the year<sup>7</sup>**

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
All children	252	305	285	246	273
Care leavers aged 16+	97	100	101	92	110

To support a care leaver who decides to become more independent the local authority has a duty to provide continued support including a Personal Advisor (referred to locally as a Leaving Care Worker). As part of the Gloucestershire improvement journey we recognise the benefit of assigning leaving care worker to all care leavers at the earliest possible point in their journey to independence. We want to review our model with a view to ensuring that all care leavers are allocated a leaving care worker in a timely manner so that they might receive a consistently high level of advice and support during their transitional years leading to early adulthood. Our ambition is

**Care leavers in Education, Employment or Training (%)**



<sup>7</sup> Local data 17-21 year olds only

<sup>8</sup> Rahamim, A., & Mendes, P. (2015). Mental health supports and young people transitioning from Out-of-Home Care Victoria Children Australia, First view.

# Our current offer

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 made it a statutory requirement for all Local Authorities to publish a local offer for care leavers. We worked in partnership with care leavers in our county to prepare our offer. We listened to their voices and involved them both in the content of the offer and in the design of the core offer booklet.

The booklet is now given to all our care leavers as part of a leaving care pack. The pack includes the offer booklet, a one page summary of the offer, a pathway planning tool and a journey to independence tool. Together with support from a key professional these packs will help to ensure our care leavers better understand their rights, entitlements and responsibilities.

You can find a copy of the core offer and other helpful tools and guidance for care leavers here:

<https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/children-young-people-and-families/care-leavers-offer-2018/>

## Pathway Plans

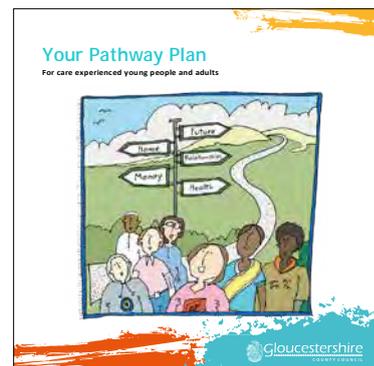
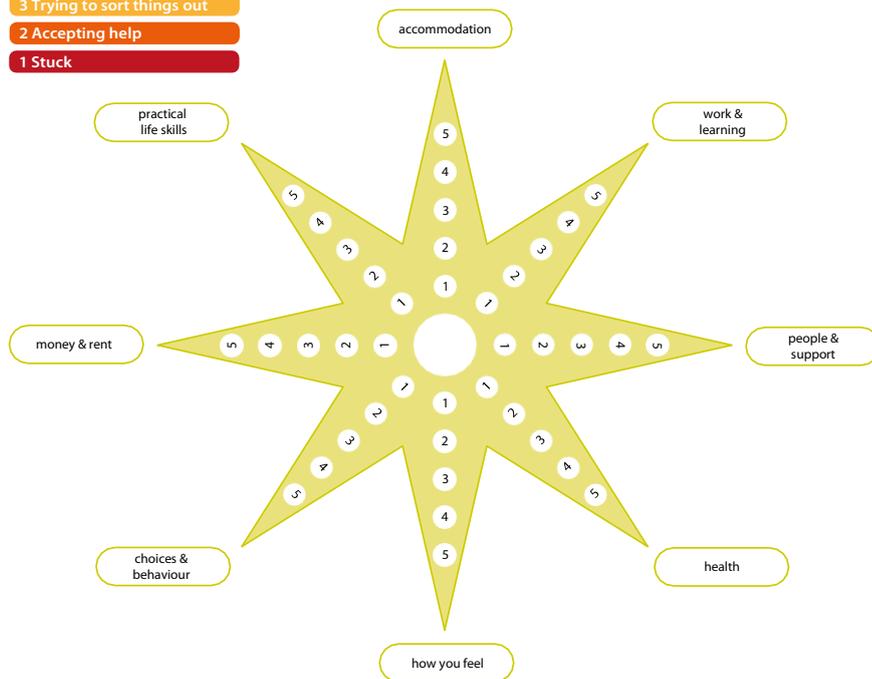
We are committed to ensuring that the quality of pathway plans is consistently good, the content aspirational and that care leavers are actively engaged in contributing to the development of these plans. We also want all our workers to be clear about the outcomes required for our care leavers.

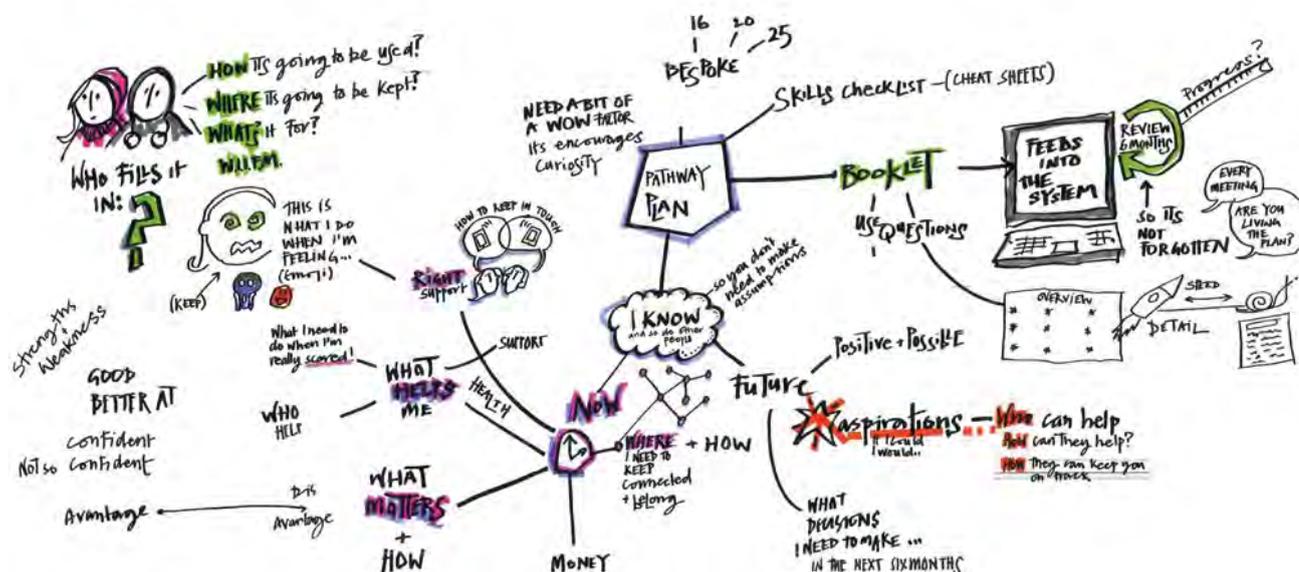
<sup>9</sup> A copy of the Gloucestershire Pathway Planning tool can be found at <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/children-young-people-and-families/care-leavers-offer-2018/>

The Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 specify that a Pathway Plan<sup>9</sup> must be prepared as soon as possible after the assessment of needs and must be recorded in writing. The local authority must review the Pathway Plan at least every six months.

To ensure this is the case we have developed a tool that workers can use to ensure

- 5 Independent
- 4 Getting there with support
- 3 Trying to sort things out
- 2 Accepting help
- 1 Stuck





that Pathway Plans completion is a collaborative process between the worker and young person, over multiple visits where necessary. The tool<sup>10</sup> was developed in consultation with workers and care leavers. The young persons outcomes star on page 10 has been embedded within the tool as a means of ensuring our young people are active co-producers of sustainable change in their lives and as a means to formally track progress towards positive outcomes. A 16 Plus Pathway Panel has been established to review Pathway Plans and ensure that the accommodation needs of children leaving care are being met and as a mechanism to offer robust challenge, scrutiny, insight and support into the work conducted by Officers and Teams who support care leavers<sup>11</sup>.

We know that care leavers, particularly those in contact with the youth justice system, may be especially vulnerable at points of transition. We want to ensure our workers consistently focus on long term planning for care leavers to anticipate their needs and help them to become successful adults. To ensure our local strategic planning takes account of the needs of our care experienced young people and

adults we have also introduced an "Access to resource panel" to our practice. This panel provides financial grip on the appropriate and proportionate allocation of resources to care leavers, as well as management oversight for decision making, monitoring arrangements and reviews.

*"I would like to see my extended family more, mostly my uncle."*

*"I absolutely love this! Honestly wish I'd had this when starting my pathway plan. There wasn't anything I couldn't read or didn't make sense. I love the idea of the star instead of loads of questions that don't really paint a picture, this is better. I also like the fact this is something a young person can not only keep but also understand, I always ask my worker to send me a copy and it's always hard to understand. I also love the fact that it feels more like they are doing it with you and not for you as you can understand everything and there's no jargon or anything like that."*

Quote from care leaver on seeing the new pathway plan tool for the first time.

<sup>10</sup> See page 16 for more detail on this panel.

# Education training and employment

We want to ensure that all our care leavers have aspirations and opportunities for success in education, employment and training.

---

*“Support from various services, the leaving care worker, the education team has been absolutely fantastic. They have pushed me to achieve things and carried me when I couldn’t really carry myself.”<sup>11</sup>*

---



- 2017/18 end of year figures indicated that 36% of care leavers in Gloucestershire were not in education, employment or training (NEET).<sup>12</sup>
- Currently only 6% of care leavers in England age 19-21 go into higher education and those that do are nearly twice as likely to drop out as their peers. In 2018 only 4% of care leavers age 19-21 in Gloucestershire went to university. In Gloucestershire increasing numbers of care leavers are going to university as mature students over the age of 21. In 2018, we had 32 Gloucestershire care leavers enrolled in university courses.

In Gloucestershire all care leavers are encouraged and supported to achieve their potential in education. We have a well developed network of specialist education, training

and support workers to support our care leavers in overcoming barriers to education, employment and training. We have strong connections with named contacts in a number of other agencies across Gloucestershire including the Job Centre and University of Gloucestershire. These links are vital in supporting our care leavers to engage with education, employment and training.

Any care leavers who have a disability, health issue or needs some support to gain confidence can be connected with the

Forwards Gloucestershire<sup>13</sup> service. Forwards provides young people and adults with career help to identify skills and job goals, improve confidence, manage anxiety and overcome barriers.

Gloucestershire County Council also has a well established “Work it Out” programme which offers tailored work experience and apprenticeship opportunities at Gloucestershire County Council and in other local organisations. We have aspirations to further expand and develop our work experience and apprenticeship offer both

<sup>11</sup> Our voices, a film by care leavers for care leavers 2018

<sup>12</sup> LAIT data 17-21 year olds only

<sup>13</sup> <http://forwardsgloucestershire.co.uk>

within the Local Authority as part of our “family business” and with wider local partners.

We are committed to support those young people who wish to attend university. Under our current arrangements based on a 3 year degree programme a care leaver could receive a £2000 per year bursary plus further support, where necessary, towards their living costs. As part of our commitment to supporting care leavers to complete their university course we provide an achievement award to the value of £2000. For those that wish to continue into postgraduate education we provide a bursary of £2000 as a one off payment.

We recognise the difficulties faced by those care leavers who choose to take on apprenticeships. Travel costs and equipment or clothing requirements can make it difficult to maintain the transition. We support those care leavers to

apply for bursaries to help them get started, and maintain the position throughout the first year. Our care leavers have told us that even with the bursaries it can be difficult to maintain an apprenticeship while living independently and trying to budget for food, bills, housing etc. In response to this we developed a policy to “top up” low apprenticeship salaries to ensure our care leavers do not have to work for less than minimum wage.

A further challenge our care leavers informed us about was the cost of travelling to an apprenticeship or training course. We give care leavers 100 free journeys if they need to travel to a new course, apprenticeship or employment. We recognise that learning to drive can increase a young persons employability. Further detail of the monetary support provided can be found in our financial policy.<sup>14</sup>

We will continue to strive to meet the following ambitions:

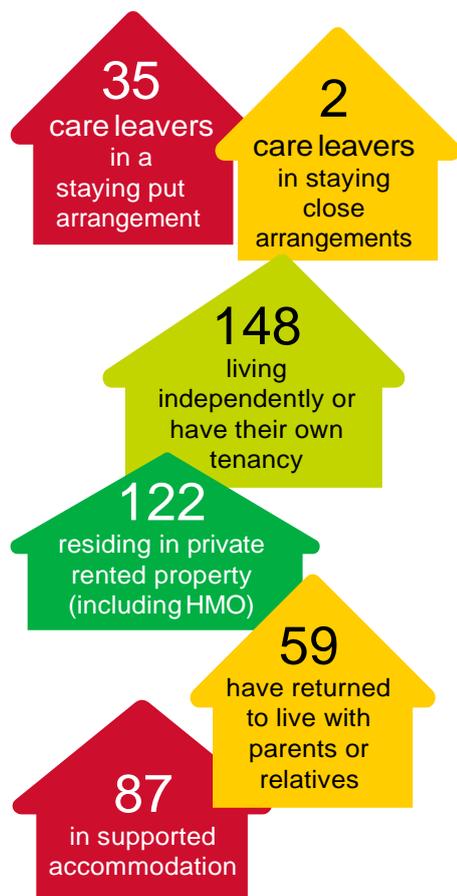
- Embed effective strategies to reduce the cohort of care leavers who are currently not in education training or employment.
- Support all care leavers to achieve financial stability.
- Ensure every care leaver is supported to achieve their individual career aspirations.
- Apprenticeships and work experience opportunities to be widened to include developing an offer with local businesses.
- Pathway Plan to be reviewed whenever there is a change in a Young Person’s circumstance. The process will be quality assured through manager sign off and audit.
- Management and oversight of the quality of PWP’s will be strengthened to ensure they are SMART and timely.
- Pathway Planning tools to be rolled out and used for all reviews.

<sup>14</sup> [https://gloucestershirechildcare.proceduresonline.com/files/financial\\_pr\\_yp\\_leav\\_care.pdf](https://gloucestershirechildcare.proceduresonline.com/files/financial_pr_yp_leav_care.pdf)

# Accommodation

We are committed to commissioning differently to increase placement stability and reduce placement moves by providing a variety of accommodation options to help our care leavers transition to independence.

Snapshot of where our care experienced young people and adults where living in May 2019.



- 68 care leavers residing out of county
- 5 in unsuitable accommodation (custody)
- 3 in unsuitable accommodation (hospital setting)
- 31 in unsuitable accommodation (homeless, rough sleeping, sofa surfing)

We are working in partnership with our providers to demonstrate commitment to working with our young people throughout their lifelong journey.

In 2018 Gloucestershire County Council published our revised Sufficiency Strategy ‘Right Placement, First Time’. Within the strategy we committed to increasing the number of beds and the variety of accommodation we offer to our care leavers. Work to develop this complete platform of accommodation options for care leavers is already underway. Accommodation options will range from supported living with shared or single occupancy with 24/7 support, to staying put options in foster care post 18 years. As part of our commitment to increasing accommodation stability for care leavers we will increase the number of emergency beds available to them.

In line with the intentions stated in our sufficiency strategy, we have begun to develop semi-independent accommodation with specialist services to help our young people aged 16+ as they transition to independence. It will include a designated space for day

provision of Intensive Recovery Intervention and residential health placements for young people needing mental health support. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 introduced new full housing duties to those who are deemed to be in priority need or intentionally homeless. In addition, the Act introduced a prevention duty requiring the Local Authority to take reasonable steps in cases where young people are at risk of homelessness. In Gloucestershire the county council and the districts have made a commitment to develop a joint protocol to support care leavers to access housing.

As part of our work to fulfil this duty we have reviewed and improved our planning for those care leavers who are in custody. Gloucestershire is committed to planning in advance to ensure any young person in custody has a plan in place for transition to suitable accommodation upon release. We work in close partnership with the police and prison service to plan for day release to view accommodation, and to develop our training and emergency bed offer<sup>15</sup> and ensure the smooth transition of our young people upon return to the community.

<sup>15</sup> Section 38(6) Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) Act 1984 places a duty on the police to transfer children who have been refused bail to local authority accommodation rather than keeping them in the police station overnight. These are often referred to as PACE beds or section 38 beds.

## Supported accommodation

We want to ensure that young people in Gloucestershire are given the best life chances as they transition into adulthood. To this end we have invested 2.5 million pounds into the development of Trevone House as a resource centre for young people. We are working in partnership with Gloucestershire Constabulary and the NHS 2gether trust to transform Trevone House into a place of safety and calm that includes health placements for those in need of mental health support, training flats, and designated space for day provision from the Intensive Recovery Intervention Service. We know that our second largest cohort of children coming into care are 16 and 17

year olds and this is causing increasing demand for supported living placements such as semi independent accommodation.

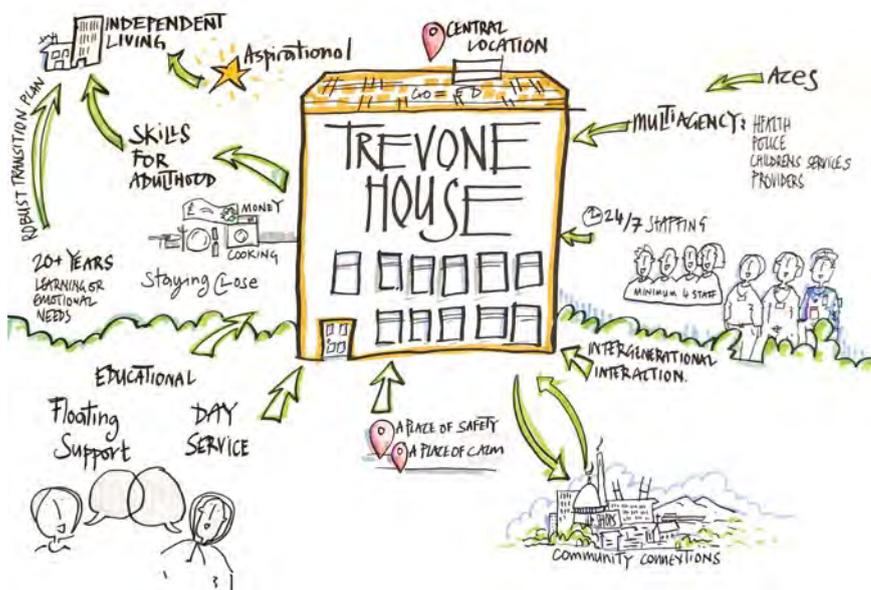
Currently, we are placing our young people in these types of placements outside of the county but there is evidence that these placements are not in the young person's best interests. Young people placed at a distance from home are likely to achieve poorer educational and other outcomes than those placed closer to their home. By bringing these placements in to the county, young people can keep strong links with their family and friends and achieve better outcomes



*"I wish I had more support with my mental health as it has got a lot worse since I moved into independent living."*<sup>16</sup>

### Care leaver

Care leavers typically tend to move to independent living at a younger age than those who are not in care. Many care leavers transition to independent living at the age of 18. In Gloucestershire our care leavers have told us that it is important to them to be well prepared for the challenges (such as budgeting, paying bills and maintaining personal hygiene) that come with living independently. Care leavers felt it was important that they have a number of opportunities, in locations where they were comfortable, to learn the skills they needed for when they left care. Care leavers reflected that the right time to receive training and support would differ for each of them in terms of when they would be ready to engage with this type of learning. They felt having peer mentors to deliver this training would be ideal.



<sup>16</sup> Bright spots 2018

## Spotlight on 16 Plus Pathway Panel

Here in Gloucestershire we are committed to being the best Corporate Parents we can possibly be.

To this end we continually review and refresh the ways we meet our duties to care experienced young people. In 2019 the following priorities were recognised by the Corporate Parent :



- i) The quality of Pathway Plans needs to be consistent
- ii) Pathway plans need to set a high standard of intervention for the young person particularly in relation to accommodation, support and independence
- iii) Some young people aged over 16 can fall through the net (late entry into care; increased vulnerability; disengagement from care services or through risk of homelessness) and the Corporate Parent needs to promote the sharpest of professional interest in these young people
- iv) Corporate Parenting does not stop at the age of 18, and planning for independence particularly for those young people whose care experiences have been challenging or difficult need a platform for discussion

As a result Children's Commissioning has established the monthly 16 Plus Multi - Agency Pathway Panel with oversight of the Children's Director and wide membership from young people's mental health services, to Adult Social Care & Transitions through to Children's Services and Housing. Its purpose is to achieve greater scrutiny, challenge and support for our care experienced young people by addressing transitions issues, provider and commissioning priorities and safeguarding themes.

Young people are selected for 16+ Pathway Panel according to criteria of age (regardless of upper age limit), care journey and vulnerability. Their Social Worker and Team Manager present the young person's plan and intervention for discussion and external scrutiny by the panel. Each case is held by Panel until such time as the Pathway Plan and intervention are considered robust.

Panel is committed to hearing young people's cases where there is (an often complex) risk of homelessness at the earliest stages. This is where a young person already in care is at risk of homelessness through eviction or whose circumstances have deteriorated.

Panel have in place an informal risk management mechanism overseen by a Project Manager and a Housing Manager, in conjunction with the Children In Care & Permanency Service. Panel seeks to intervene informally where risks are low to medium, and formally where risks are high.

Children's Commissioning seeks the views and experiences of young people as one of its measures in assessing how effective housing and support providers are in meeting the needs of young people in care and care leavers. The Quality Assurance & Compliance Framework ensures that young people's accommodation meets quality standards and the care given to young people is experienced to a good standard.

In addition, our Ambassadors are able to conduct peer to peer quality assurance using our Outcomes Framework tool to review stability, support, skills and whether the young person feels their voice is heard.

Through our commissioning process with current and new providers we are requesting that providers use the Young Peoples Outcome Star framework, which we have embedded within our pathway planning tool. This approach allows for a joined up assessment and review process which clearly identifies each young person's level of need. It also gives us an indication of the effectiveness of services, from all our provider leaving care contracts, in supporting our young people on their journey to independence.

## Staying close

As part of our commitment to ensuring our care leavers do not have to face life's milestones alone we have



embedded a Staying Close policy in Gloucestershire. The Staying Close option is for those young people who are needing to transition on from a residential setting to a more independent living arrangement. This enables our care leavers to stay in touch with staff and friends they know well; stay connected with the local community, have access to 24 hour crisis support and have somewhere (and someone) to celebrate special occasions.

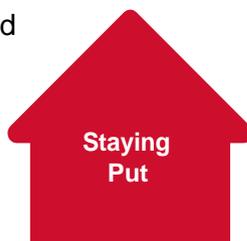
In some circumstances, it is necessary to place our young people out of county for their own safety. In these instances they often develop connections and become involved in their new local community. When they are leaving care it is not always best for these young people to be brought back into Gloucestershire. By commissioning differently we have ensured that our Staying Close offer is available to those young people who for their safety must be placed out of

county. In these circumstances our providers act as tenant in kind to enable young people to access out of county accommodation in an affordable way

## Staying Put<sup>17</sup>

It is recognised that many looked after children, like other young people, should be able to remain living with their carers if this meets their needs. Gloucestershire County Council promotes this ambition and supports Staying Put as a way of enabling young people to remain with their foster carers post 18. In May 2019 we had 38 care leavers in a Staying Put arrangement. This has been increasing steadily since 2017 when the total was 25.<sup>18</sup>

If we are to increase the number of staying put options for our care leavers we must ensure that we recruit more foster carers. We have pledged to further increase the number of in house foster placements by 100 households within the next 3 years. To make our offer more appealing to Foster Carers we have recently revised our payment profile and launched a pilot scheme to



enhance the level of therapeutic support and training we offer to our foster carers. We are currently running a countywide recruitment campaign for foster carers.

We will continue to strive to meet the following ambitions:

- ➔ Increased choice for care leavers in relation to the home that they live in and an increase in young people choosing "staying put" into adulthood.
- ➔ An increased choice of accommodation options for older young people and for care leavers returning from external fostering and residential homes.
- ➔ Ensure all our care leavers have multiple opportunities, in a variety of locations to receive consistent high quality accredited independent living skills training.
- ➔ Explore the possibility of developing a peer mentoring model to support independent living skills training.
- ➔ A review of the number of crash pads to be undertaken with a view to increasing the number available.

<sup>17</sup> [https://gloucestershirechildcare.proceduresonline.com/p\\_stay\\_put.html](https://gloucestershirechildcare.proceduresonline.com/p_stay_put.html)

<sup>18</sup> Snapshot taken in May 2017, 2018 and 2019.

# Health

The Department of Education Statutory Guidance – Promoting the health and wellbeing of looked-after children (2015) states that local authorities should ensure that there are effective plans in place to enable looked after children aged 16 to 17 to make a smooth transition to adulthood, and that they are able to continue to obtain the health advice and services they need.



The Corporate Parenting Board is committed to ensuring our care leavers stay emotionally and physically safe and well. Research indicates a higher proportion of both physical and emotional health difficulties among care leavers. In Gloucestershire 27% of care leavers reported that they had a disability or health condition that affected their day to day lives compared to 22% of their peers.<sup>19</sup>

---

*“Mental health has deteriorated since being here. Depression and anxiety has got worse”*

Care leaver, living alone.

Every young person should be offered a final health assessment before they leave care. The assessment will outline how their physical and emotional

health needs will be met and this will inform their pathway plan through the transition to independence.

Care leavers can access health related information and advice from our youth support workers. Workers also provide specialist support for mental health, substance misuse, sexual health, and pregnancy or parenthood concerns.

Older children in care and care leavers will be supported to access universal health services as part of their journey to independence. This will include registration with a GP and information about local sexual health services and how to access health services out of hours.

---

*“It would be nice to have someone who could be there when I need to speak with someone. Someone who could listen to me when things are not going so well.”*

Care leaver

As part of transition to independence all children in care in Gloucestershire will be offered a health passport from around the age of eleven years. The health passport will include personal and family health history. The health passport can be added to as needed or reissued if it has been misplaced.

We know there is a need for support for care leavers who face mental health challenges but who do not meet threshold

<sup>19</sup>Bright Spots Survey 2018

for adult social care/adult mental health services to manage their condition in the community. We know that care leavers, particularly those in contact with the criminal justice system, may be especially vulnerable at points of transition. We want to ensure our local strategic planning takes account of their needs across the continuum of care (within primary care, community services and acute provision). Our 16+ Pathway Panel has the designated nurse for CiC in attendance to ensure young people's health needs are reviewed as part of their pathway plan.

Our ambassadors championed the "Teens in Crisis" pilot in 2016. It continues to offer online counselling for young people. Over 100 people have accessed almost 300 sessions. The waiting time for support is under a week and evaluation has shown a positive impact on improving the emotional resilience of teenagers in Gloucestershire. Care experienced young people and adults in Gloucestershire can also access the On Your Mind<sup>20</sup> website for online support.



In Gloucestershire 27% of our care leavers are parents which is higher than the comparator average of 19%<sup>21</sup>. We have a particularly vulnerable group of care experienced young people who are also parents themselves. We have a teenage pregnancy specialist embedded

within our Youth Support Service. We work closely with midwife teams to ensure early intervention with young parents. Our focus is on empowering our care experienced parents to give their child the best possible chances in life.

We will continue to strive to meet the following ambitions:

- To ensure that every young person has an up to date health assessment that outlines how their physical and emotional health needs will be met which informs their pathway plan before they leave care.
- To ensure that care leavers have advice and support relating to their physical and emotional wellbeing prior to moving onto independence or semi independence, with any relevant referral/signposting in place to the appropriate adult health service
- Every child or young person with a package of continuing care who is approaching adulthood will have a multi-agency plan for an active transition process to adult or universal health services or to a more appropriate specialised or NHS Continuing Healthcare pathway. The established 16+ panel will support this.
- Young people are empowered to promote their own wellbeing through understanding healthy choices and how to access relevant health services.
- To ensure personal advisors are trained to promote health and wellbeing of care leavers and navigate through the health economy.
- Ensure all care leavers have access to and understand their health history.
- Conduct a review of the current health passports to ensure all children in care and care leavers have access to and understand their health history.
- Review and understand the role and remit of CiC health team offer to care leavers
- Review mental provision for YP who do not meet the threshold for Adult Mental Health support
- Appoint 2 emotional resilience workers to support young people age 18+

<sup>20</sup> On Your Mind [www.onyourmindglos.nhs.uk](http://www.onyourmindglos.nhs.uk)

<sup>21</sup> Bright Spots Survey 2018

# Connections and community



In the Gloucestershire “Looking to the Future” strategy we pledged to make Gloucestershire a child friendly county, increase the resilience and safety of children and families, as well as giving our children in care and care leavers the best possible opportunities. Gloucestershire County Council is part of a unique collaboration between public sector, voluntary and community organisations with a mission to build communities that are aware of, talk about and take action on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). We are building a social movement that recognises the potential lifelong impacts

of adversity in childhood. As communities and organisations we are committed to preventing adverse childhood experiences but also building resilience against long-term harm from ACEs. Through our ACEs work we will be building resilience

- We will continue to strive to meet the following ambitions:
- Develop a participation strategy that is regularly reviewed and updated
  - Work with partners to develop a Gloucestershire Care Leavers Covenant.
  - Establish a multi-agency tracking panel to ensure care leavers are connected with the right support as they reach adulthood.
  - Create 4 locality leaving care resource centres across the county where leaving care young people will be able to access their worker. They will also be able to access advice, appointments or information sessions on housing, education, training, employment, health (physical and emotional, youth services and specialist support (e.g resource centre for UASC).
  - Ensure our resource centres offer facilities for activities, cooking, washing clothes, showers and 1:1 space for appointments including therapies.
  - Set up a consultation event for Care Leavers to review the care leaver offer in January 2020
  - Thematic Champions to be identified for care leavers
  - Care leaver themes to be identified and entered onto the forward planning for future meetings
  - Membership to be reviewed and at least DWP and Probation need to be included in the membership of the Board
  - Promote care leaver events and activities to wider councillors
  - Profile of elected members to be undertaken to identify individuals offers for careleavers
  - Review level of advocacy offered to Care Leavers through the current contract
  - Re-advertise the offer and process around Advocacy to both staff and care leavers

in the future cohort of care experienced young people. You can find out more about our approach to ACEs at <https://www.actionaces.org/>

We have committed to introducing a multi-agency

transition tracking panel<sup>22</sup> to ensure we identify all children from the age of 14 who might meet the threshold for adult services. The panel means we can work with families early to prepare for the move to adult services.

<sup>22</sup> Transition Panel includes partners from health, children’s services, education, adult LD and mental health.

# Finances

According to the 2018 bright spots survey care leavers were three times more likely than the general population to have financial difficulties.

Gloucestershire County Council provides a high level of financial support to our care experienced young people and adults. Details of that support permeate throughout this document. For a full breakdown you can refer to our Financial Procedures for young people leaving care.

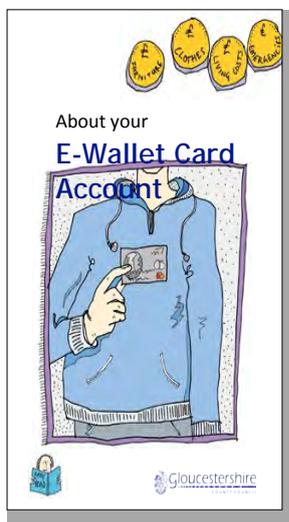


In Gloucestershire we have introduced the E-Wallet card account to make it easier to instantly transfer money to our young people. Leaving care workers will support care leavers to obtain an E-Wallet card. Having this card means that the Setting Up Home allowance and any other agreed payments can be instantly accessed. It also means our young people can choose to buy items in person, over the internet or by phone.

We recognise that care leavers are a particularly vulnerable group when it comes to council tax. When they move into independent accommodation it is often the first time they are faced with managing their own finances. Council tax debt

[https://gloucestershirechildcare.proceduresonline.com/files/financial\\_pr\\_yp\\_leav\\_care.pdf](https://gloucestershirechildcare.proceduresonline.com/files/financial_pr_yp_leav_care.pdf)

Leaving care workers support young people to make applications to Gloucestershire Credit Union, who can then assist young people to open an account, get a pre-paid debit card, manage debt and access other financial services. This helps our young people to establish or re-establish a good credit history. If a young person is a new arrival to the UK, the Credit Union can support them with opening an account as they are more flexible than a high street bank. This approach enables young people to receive state benefits paid directly into their account.



can be very frightening for care leavers and can quickly escalate to court summons and enforcement action being taken. In order to increase the chances of success in independent living arrangements from April 2019 we introduced exemption from council tax for care leavers up to their 22nd birthday.

We will continue to strive to meet the following ambition:

→ Commission Asdan evidence based financial management programme to support our leaving care young people to develop their skills and understanding about money management.

Review partnership offer to ensure consistency on:

- Intentionality of Homelessness is made not applicable for care leavers
- Establish agreement that Council Tax relief is on a sliding scale for 22-25 year olds
- Local businesses to be approached to seek to establish agreement that a contribution of goods to a set value be made available for all care leavers.





Copyright © Gloucestershire County Council 2019.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system of any nature, or transmitted, in any form or by any means including photocopying and recording, without the prior written permission of Gloucestershire County Council, the copyright owner. Licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency or any other reproduction rights organisation do not apply. If any unauthorised acts are carried out in relation to this copyright work, a civil claim for damages may be made and/or a criminal prosecution may result.



Prepared by Gloucestershire County Council Children and Families Commissioning Team  
Shire Hall, Westgate Street, Gloucester GL1 2TG