

Introduction

This leaflet tells you about all the support that we have in Hillingdon for you as a care leaver. We know that it is a big step when you move out of care and start living more independently.

Just because you are leaving care, or have already left care, we haven't stopped caring about you. We want to make sure that you feel safe and supported and know where and who to go to for advice and help.

Stepping Out, your Care Leavers Council have helped make this leaflet. We will continue to listen to your views to make sure the services we offer are what you need.

To be able to get the support set out in this leaflet, you must have been in care for at least 13 weeks between the ages of 14 and 16 (including your 16th birthday) or for 13 weeks after your 16th birthday. If you are not sure whether you qualify for support, then ask your personal adviser.

This leaflet is available online at

<https://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/article/30145/Leaving-care>, or you can email childrensrights@hillingsdon.gov.uk to request more copies.

Your personal adviser will talk with you about the information in this leaflet.

1. The support we must give you by law

A Personal Adviser

Until April 2018 the law said that we must appoint a Personal Adviser (also known as a PA) to support you until you reach age 21 (or to age 25 if you are in education or training).

Following changes introduced through the Children & Social Work Act 2017, you will be able to ask to have support from your Personal Adviser up to the age of 25 whether you are in education or training or not. This is to try to make sure care leavers receive similar support to young adults who live with their families.

Your Personal Adviser is there to help you to prepare to live independently and to offer advice and support after you leave care. Personal Advisers get involved in discussions about your needs and your pathway plan.

Your pathway plan is written by the local authority after consultation with you and important people in your life. It sets out your needs, views and future goals, and exactly what support you will receive from us. We review your pathway plan with you regularly so that it is kept up-to-date and ensure that you have a copy.

We will try to ensure you keep the same Personal Adviser throughout the time that we work with you, though this will not always be possible. The amount of support that you receive from your Personal Adviser will depend on what you want and your circumstances.

Your leaving care team will consider with you what extra support you may need. You might, for example, need extra support because:

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

Your right to be heard and taken seriously

You have a right to be involved in all decisions about your plans for leaving care. You have a right to support from an independent advocate if you are thinking about challenging decisions about the care we give you.

Independent advocates can inform you about your rights and help you to be heard in meetings. They are separate from social services. This service is currently provided by NYAS, you can refer yourself to them using this online form <https://www.nyas.net/referral-form/>

You have a right to see the information we keep about you, including the files and records written about you when you were in care. You will need to ask your PA if you want to see them and we may recommend that you read them with someone else in the room to answer any questions that you have.

Leaving care before turning 18

We will encourage you to stay in care until you are 18. Most young people still live at home with their families at this age.

If you choose to leave care before age 18, the law says we must provide you with suitable accommodation.

Support to engage in education, employment or training

We want to make sure every young person leaving care has the support to achieve their goals in life. We want you to succeed in your education, training and employment. We will ask you how you are doing and be ready to celebrate your achievements with you.

We can provide you with:

- Support if you choose to go to university, such as helping you obtain tuition fees and maintenance loans and paying for your vacation accommodation. We will help you choose the right course and university that matches your talents and interests.
- We will provide you with a Higher Education (HE) bursary of £2,000 across the life of the course if you go to University.
- If you attend College and are aged 16-19, you can claim a bursary of £1,200 per year to help with the cost of books and materials.

- Support to meet your transport costs when travelling to training, school/college, apprenticeships or job interviews.
- Support to buy tools, equipment, essential clothing, and books.
- The chance to attend and help organise celebration events when young people achieve education, training and employment milestones.

2. Other support we offer

Accommodation

If you are aged over 18, your Personal Adviser will help you to find suitable accommodation). This might involve:

- Working with Placements Service to identify with suitable housing options for you, including supported accommodation if you are not ready to live independently.
- If this is what you and your foster carers want, supporting you to remain with your foster carers under what's called a 'Staying Put' arrangement. This can last until you are 21
- Support to access different housing options including where appropriate and eligibility criteria is met your PA will make a referral to the care leaver's housing panel. This is accommodation managed by us or a housing association). Young people with the following vulnerabilities may be eligible to go on the Housing Register:
 - Young people with moderate learning difficulties or disability or those who are subject to a statement of educational needs or a psychological assessment.
 - Young people with significant mental health issues – who have had involvement with CAMHS or CMHT for a period of three months or longer and are continuing to receive treatment.
 - Young people with complex needs placed in high cost placements `where they no longer require that degree of support and whose application has been approved by the 'Access to Resources Panel' or the 'Asylum High Cost Placement Panel'.
 - Young people with significant offending behaviour, which limits access to other types of suitable accommodation.
 - Young people leaving care who are also parents and also meet one other criteria listed (e.g. they or their baby are especially vulnerable).
 - Those with other mitigating circumstances.

- Advice about holding down a tenancy, including avoiding rent or Council Tax arrears, paying bills and budgeting. We know it can be very hard having your own place for the first time.
- Helping you to claim housing benefit/universal credit.
- Practical support with moving into and furnishing your new home.
- Supporting you if you have a housing crisis, including helping if you are threatened with or lose a tenancy.

Health and wellbeing

Below are some of the ways our Leaving care team and your Personal Adviser can support you to stay healthy and look after your physical and mental health. We can:

- Give you information on healthy living including your emotional well-being and mental health.
- Support you to register with a GP, dentist and optician (You may need to change these if your address changes)
- Give you information about counselling services that are available locally
- If you are a young parent, take an interest in your child/ren and support you to do the best for them. Including encouraging you to engage with health visitors and children centres.
- Give you information about health drop-in centres (where available) and other local services

Access to health records

Your GP holds your primary health records including your medical history and immunisations. If you would like access or a copy of these please speak to your GP surgery directly.

To access the records that are held in respect of your health assessments that were undertaken when you were looked after you can request to see the summaries of health assessments which have been sent to your social worker.

If you want to see the full health assessment paperwork please see <https://www.cnwl.nhs.uk/service-users-carers/health-records/access/>

Finances

We will try to help you financially, in a similar way to how parents would support their own children. Our help includes:

- Providing a leaving care grant to help you buy essential things when moving into your own home, this is a total of £2,000. This is broken down into several sections details of which are available in the financial policy leaflet.
- Providing or telling you about relevant money management courses
- Exceptional financial support in emergencies
- For a further breakdown and details of the financial support available to you, please see the Financial Policy leaflet that you can download from: <https://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/article/30145/Leaving-care>

Relationships

As well as support from a Personal Adviser, we may be able to offer you additional practical and emotional support, such as:

- Emotional support through relationship changes and advice on how to deal with loss
- Support to manage and maintain different types of relationships
- Advice and signposting if you need help and guidance on dealing with difficult or harmful relationships

Participation in Society

We want our care leavers to be active members of society, and to have all the chances in life that other young adults have. We can help you participate in society in the following ways:

- Providing information on groups and clubs you may wish to join or

programmes that will help you to enhance your practical living skills.

- Informing you about relevant awards, schemes and competitions you can enter, in line with your talents and interests
- Encouraging and helping you to enrol on the Electoral Register, so you can vote in elections (if you are eligible.)
- Offering work experience within the council (where available)
- Informing you about voluntary work that we think you may be interested in
- Giving you skills and ability to challenge any issues you face as a care leaver.

Access to records

Please speak to your PA about requesting access to your social care records or go to www.hillingdon.gov.uk and search “subject access request to view the fully policy.

COMPLAINTS

3. Who can help?

Within and for the council

- First contact should always be your PA. You will be given their mobile number, make sure this is saved on your phone so that you have it if you need it.
- If your PA is not in then you will be passed over to a duty officer. To contact duty, ring your PA’s number and you will be diverted to the Switchboard who will then connect you with the correct worker.
- Head of Service: Zafer Yilkan 01895 277 327
zyilkan@hillingsdon.gov.uk
- The Children’s Rights and Participation Team - Email: childrensrights@hillingsdon.gov.uk
- NYAS, Advocacy Provider - Tel: 08088081001 Email: help@nyas.net or download the NYAS app from your app store
- To make a formal complaint about the services offered by Hillingdon please see <https://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/complaints>

- You can complain
 - via email complaintsmailbox@hillingdon.gov.uk
 - via post - to Complaints and enquiries team, 3S/03A Civic Centre, High Street, Uxbridge UB8 1UW
 - via telephone:
 - 01895 277801
 - 01895 277143
 - 01895 556015

Other places you can go for help:

- Become's Care Advice Line - Tel: 0800 023 2033
Email: advice@becomecharity.org.uk
- Children's commissioner Help at Hand Advice Line - Tel: 0800 528 0731
Email: help.team@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk
- P3 Navigator - 01895 436 114

Relevant universal services:

- Targeted Programmes offer a wide range of activities that you may find beneficial; from peer leadership, volunteering opportunities, sexual health and wellbeing and practical life skills training. Please speak to your PA for more information about what they offer and how to get involved
- Citizens Advice Bureau - 0344 848 7903