

Title/Status-	Joint Protocol
New document or revised	Revised
Date approved SMT	January 2022
Responsible Head of Service	Head of Service Looked after Children, Virtual School, Fostering & Adoption
Date review	January 2023

Joint Protocol between:

Jobcentre Plus and Leicestershire County Council Care Leavers Team



Department
for Work &
Pensions



Introduction

This joint Protocol has been agreed between Leicestershire County Council Care Leavers Team and the local Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in Leicestershire. It is recognised that a close working relationships between the Care Leavers Team and the local DWP will support the transition from care to independence of care leavers. It seeks to identify the appropriate roles of all parties and promote effective joint working to meet the needs and interests of young people leaving care.

The DWP Care Leavers Covenant (October 2018) recognises the difficulties experienced by young people leaving care and that it is important for all sections of society to support care leavers to make a successful transaction to adulthood and to live independently.

We believe that every young person should be encouraged and supported to plan their future careers and achieve their potential through learning new skills and having a wide range of practical experiences.

We are committed to raising young people's aspirations by providing on-going support to help them make positive decisions about their future.

Young people who enter local authority care can, if not adequately supported, leave care with poor educational attainment and low aspirations which can result in long term unemployment.

This protocol identifies the agreed procedure to assist care leavers to make a new claim for benefit, should this be required as they turn 18 years old.

Aims of the Protocol

It is recognised that when care leavers first enter the benefit system the complexity of the system combined with their own complex needs can result in delays in their claim being completed.

Jobcentre Plus (JCP) and Leicestershire County Council (LCC) will work together to provide an enhanced service to support young people leaving care into education, employment and training. This will ensure: -

- Co-ordinated support to engage young people into Education, Employment or Training

- An early entry system and a smooth transition for those young people leaving care and needing to claim benefits
- Prompt and accurate payment of benefits where these are required
- Young people are empowered and enabled to gain sustainable paid employment through individual pathways

Jobcentre Plus (JCP) will:

- Provide the Care Leavers Team with up to date contact details for Work Coaches supporting care leavers
- Provide an early entry system for care leavers (Support for completing online claim for Universal Credit in readiness for 18th birthday)
- Provide a three-way diagnostic interview at the first JCP appointment between the young person, Work Coach and the Personal Advisor in the Care Leavers Team
- Ensure that the young person is aware of all assistance available to them via the Youth Obligation Support Programme.
- Contact the young person and the Care Leavers Team, and wherever possible reiterate conditionality, before considering a sanction the first time a care leaver fails to attend an appointment with JCP
- Arrange a three-way case conference with the young person, Care Leavers Team and work coach when required
- Consider additional support products for care leavers through Work Coaches and the flexible support fund
- Incorporate this protocol into operational policies of the Jobcentre Plus

LCC Care Leavers Team will:

- Provide the DWP with up to date contact details of the Personal Advisors in the Care Leavers Team
- Gain consent from the young people to share information with the DWP, using the DWP consent form (Appendix 1) in accordance with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) if they have capacity
- Inform the DWP of care leavers (by district) of those already 18 years + (with young person's consent)
- Inform the DWP in advance of looked after young people nearing 18 years and support processing of paperwork for an early entry system (with young person's consent)
- Ensure that young people are aware of the enhanced service they will receive from the DWP
- Ensure a warm handover – 3-way diagnostic interview at start of the claim for benefit
- Re-iterate conditionality with care leaver if/when the first infringement occurs

- Attend case conferencing to support the young person on their recommended pathway where appropriate
- Provide ongoing support to the care leaver and liaison with JCP, ensuring that JCP are notified of any changes in the young person's circumstances, e.g. finishing education, a change of address or returning to parental home
- Incorporate this protocol into operational policies

Process for making first claim for Universal Credit

- Care Leavers can start the claim process 28 days before their 18th birthday.
- Each Jobcentre will have a single point of contact for care leavers (Work Coach). The Jobcentre will ensure that the Care Leavers Team have an up to date list of these contacts.
- With the assistance of their Personal Advisor (the support worker in the Care Leavers Team) the care leaver will contact the agreed single point of contact Work Coach at the relevant Jobcentre up to 28 days before the young person's 18th birthday to arrange an initial meeting (pre-claim appointment). This initial meeting will help the young person understand the role of the Work Coach and the benefit system, familiarise them with the Jobcentre, and help to ensure they have the relevant information and ID so they can make a successful claim. It is recognised that this initial interview may not be necessary for all young people.
- Each Jobcentre will have a dedicated Work Coach for care leavers although it is recognised at times it may not be possible to see this worker due to operational issues or because it is decided that it would be beneficial for the care leaver to see a different worker, for example, where a care leaver would benefit from seeing a worker of the same sex.
- The Care Leavers Team will support the young person to provide the relevant identification needed and will try to ensure that photo ID is available. It is possible to meet the ID requirements without photo ID but it is preferable to provide it where possible.
- The DWP recognise that care leavers may have additional needs or problems and will tailor the care leaver's claimant commitment to these, whilst ensuring the care leaver understands the activities they need to undertake to receive benefit. The Personal Advisor will assist the care leaver where appropriate to meet these requirements.
- Care Leavers are entitled to an advance payment of 100% of their likely benefit entitlement. Advanced payments should be discussed with the care leaver to determine at the outset of the claim if this is appropriate for them. In general as the Care Leavers Team will support the young person when they turn 18 it is not anticipated that an advanced payment will be necessary when they make their first claim at 18.
- It is recognised that care leavers often have difficulty managing money and budgeting. In most cases it is therefore appropriate to discuss having their

rent paid directly to their landlord under the alternative payment arrangements, to try and ensure the care leaver does not get into rent arrears. It is important to discuss with the care leaver that their initial payment is likely to include their housing element and ensure they are aware of their liability to pay rent from this payment.

- The Personal Advisor and the Work Coach will keep each other aware of any potential problems or crises that are occurring in the care leaver's life, in line with safeguarding policies. This is to try and ensure that problems do not occur which lead to the young person not meeting their claimant conditions and being sanctioned. These could include the care leaver not attending agreed interviews at the Jobcentre, not complying with job seeking requirements, disengaging with services, becoming ill, or other issues around vulnerability.

Signed by DWP

Position: Senior Employer Partnership Manager

Signature: Roger Matthews

ROGER MATTHEWS

Date: 10/1/1020

Signed by Local Authority:

Position: Service manager Children in Care service

Signature: