

# Lancashire Permanence Service

## Leaving Care

### Practice Guidance

This practice guidance should be read in conjunction with Lancashire County Council's procedures for working with and supporting care experienced young people ([procedures online](#)), our value based [Practice Principles](#), and our Transfer Policy for the transfer of the support for young people to the [Leaving Care Service](#). This guidance dated January 2022 supersedes any previous guidance.

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# 1 JOINT WORKING ARRANGEMENTS FOR ELIGIBLE CARE LEAVERS

## 1.1 Co-allocation of young people under 18 years

Allocation of a Personal Advisor (PA) will be requested for a young person at age 15 & ½. The transferring Team Manager (TM) will complete a case note stating that the young person requires a PA and alert this to the Leaving Care duty tray. The Leaving Care Team Managers will endeavour that a PA is allocated by 15 ¾ a minimum of one month prior to the young person's 16th birthday. For young people who become Looked After following their 16th birthday, the request for a PA will be made by the transferring Team Manager immediately in the same way via case note, and the Leaving Care Team Manager will endeavour to allocate a PA within 13 weeks that a PA is allocated.

## 1.2. Keeping In Touch

A joint visit will occur between the allocated social worker and new PA within six weeks of allocation. The PA will visit a minimum of once every 12 weeks up until the young person's 17<sup>th</sup> birthday. Between the ages of 17 and 18 the PA will visit a minimum of once every 8 weeks. Visits will focus on shared planning and the support available to progress the care and pathway plan.

## 1.3 Care and Pathway Planning

1.3.1 Joint care planning between the transferring team and leaving care team is crucial to ensure that appropriate plans are in place. Joint planning should begin as soon as it is expected that the young person will be eligible for leaving care support. The transferring team will lead on care planning, which will be attended by the Personal Advisor as a minimum. The leaving care Team Manager will attend at least one care planning meeting, attending more if complex needs or risks are identified.

1.3.2 The Personal Advisor should be invited to all care planning meetings, strategy discussions, reviews, and other meetings for their young person. For any young people who are pregnant/have a child open to Children's Social Care, their Personal Advisor should be invited to all meetings for the child and have an equal voice in these meetings.

1.3.3 The young person's initial needs assessment and pathway plan must involve the Personal Advisor and actions to support the young person's pathway into adulthood be jointly agreed between the transferring team and the Leaving Care Team. The leaving care Team Manager must be consulted in event of complexity or differing views.

## **1.4 Ceasing to be Looked After and discharge of Care Orders pre 18**

1.4.1 The Team Manager with case management responsibility should have a discussion with the leaving care Team Manager regarding the young person's plan of/for permanence and entitlement for support, at the earliest opportunity when considering to cease a child or young person's Looked After status or to discharge a care order. Examples are where a SGO is granted regardless of the age of the child, a Home Placement Agreement is ended for a young person 16/17, a 16/17-year-old is no longer on remand or a young person aged 16/17 previously homeless is no longer looked after.

1.4.2 There cannot be any compromise regarding how legislation is applied to children and young people ceasing to be looked after or following discharge of care orders, therefore it is essential that the leaving care Team Managers have been consulted to provide clear information to the court. This will ensure that all young people ceasing to be looked after are given correct and comprehensive information about their rights and entitlements as a care leaver.

1.4.3 For young people who will no longer receive support from Children's Services and whose records are being closed, a letter must be sent to them prior to closure setting out the Local Offer, their leaving care entitlements clearly and how to get in touch to access services in the future. This must be recorded on LCS and included in the closing summary and case summary.

## **2. PRACTICE GUIDANCE FOR RELEVANT AND FORMER RELEVANT CARE LEAVERS**

### **2.1 Transfer of young people's support to Leaving Care**

2.1.1 The transferring Team Manager will complete an audit of the young person's LCS file and arrange a transfer meeting with the leaving care Team Manager (as per transfer protocol). Transfer of support is requested via the LCS Transfer Document (not a case note alert).

2.1.2 If the young person's LCS file is not up to date or plan for/of permanence in adulthood not agreed between the transferring team and the Leaving Care Team, the respective Team Managers will jointly care plan with the allocated social worker and Personal Advisor and set expectations, actions, and timescales to move plans forward.

2.1.3 Support for the young person will not transfer outside of the agreed transfer protocol unless the senior managers from both teams (transferring and leaving care) agree an exception. If an exception is agreed, the senior managers will complete a case note that explains why the transfer has been accepted and the plan for rectifying any identified issues.

## 2.2 Keeping in Touch (KiT)

2.2.1 Face to face visits with young people will be conducted every eight weeks as a minimum. These will be recorded along all other contacts with young people such as phone calls, emails, text etc.

2.2.2 Contact with young people will be based on assessed need.

2.2.3 For young people whom we have lost contact with, every attempt must be made to get in touch, re-establish contact and re-build a supportive relationship. The activities to achieve this must be clearly recorded on LCS. This could include communication with DWP, college/university, relevant partners, visits, letters, phone calls, contact with family/friends and consideration of social media. Where it has not been possible to re-establish contact within a reasonable timeframe, this is escalated to the senior manager.

2.2.4 For young people who are difficult to build a relationship with or whom we have re-established contact with, a meeting/visit will be held between the young person and Team Manager, without the PA present, to talk through any issues, discuss the offer of flexible support to the needs of the young person, and explore if a different Personal Advisor could be allocated. If the young person does not wish to meet with the team manager, a care planning meeting with the Senior Manager will be held, which the young person is invited to attend.

## 2.3. Pathway Planning

2.3.1 The Needs Assessment and Pathway Plan reflect assessed needs, aspirations, risks and will be co-produced to include the young person's views and opinions. There will be multi agency involvement where appropriate and with consent of the young person. Consent will be fully discussed, and the young person be informed of the reason when information has to be shared without consent due to safeguarding concerns. Consent is to be recorded under 'young person's views' at the last page of the Pathway Plan including details of how and when this consent will be reviewed.

2.3.2 The Needs Assessment and Pathway Plan will reflect face to face discussions with the young person. The Pathway Plan should clearly reflect how the views of the young person have been sought and what attempts have been made to co-produce the assessment and plan with the young person directly. Where it has not been possible to co-produce the assessment and plan, this will be escalated to the senior manager.

2.3.3 Pathway Plan Reviews will occur a minimum of once every five months and sooner if there is a significant unplanned change in circumstances. Young people will be supported and encouraged to chair their own Pathway Plan Review meeting with key professionals invited as per their wishes. The Personal Advisor should consider any special educational needs or disabilities that the young person has when considering how best to support them to participate.

2.3.4 For any young people who are pregnant/have a child the Personal Advisor will provide additional guidance and advice. This may involve advocating on their behalf if other agencies are supporting them or their child, helping you to understand the processes of other agencies and helping them to build on their strengths as a parent, but also challenging you if necessary. Where the young person's child is open to Children's Social Care, their Personal Advisor should seek consent from the young person to attend all meetings for the child and have an equal voice in these meetings.

## 2.4 Suitable Accommodation

2.4.1 Joint working and care planning with the social work teams, the building of meaningful relationships with young people prior to a young person's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and strong partnerships with accommodation providers and district housing authorities provide the framework in which young people are supported to have suitable and lasting homes in adulthood. This is further supported through Lancashire's Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers. A variety of provisions are available including staying put, supported lodgings, supported accommodation, social/private tenancies and other options.

2.4.2 Every Personal Advisor ensures young people are provided with the correct guidance and advice in how to secure and maintain a suitable and lasting home in adulthood and practical support is provided according to the young person's abilities and needs. The quality of support and type of provisions provided is overseen via supervision and PACT meetings, as appropriate.

2.4.3 Where a young person is vulnerable to losing their home in adulthood the Personal Advisor will alert the team manager immediately, submit a Duty to Refer to the relevant District Housing Authority and follow up the referral with the required actions to ensure the young person is provided with a realistic and achievable Personal Housing Plan, provide an increased level of support to address the identified issues and identify a viable contingency plan with the young person.

2.4.4 Any young person residing in accommodation defined as 'temporary accommodation' by District Housing Authorities or in B&B accommodation regardless of whether this was provided by District Housing Authorities or LCC is deemed to reside in unsuitable accommodation. The Personal Advisor records this accordingly on LCS under KIT. Team Managers are to alert Senior Managers of any young person residing in unsuitable accommodation and senior management oversight is recorded via case note on LCS.

2.4.5 All young people residing in unsuitable accommodation are escalated to the Unsuitable Accommodation Panel chaired by the Head of Service for additional oversight.

## 2.5 Young people aged 21-25 'opting out' of leaving care support

2.5.1 All of the following conditions must be met when considering a young adult's request to 'opt out' of leaving care support:

- The young adult has specifically requested to 'opt out' and is not in education or training
- The Team Manager has met with the young adult, without the Personal Advisor, to talk through any potential issues, discuss the offer of flexible support to the needs of the young adult, and explore if a different Personal Advisor could be allocated.
- The final Pathway Plan Review and Needs Assessment evidence that there are no identified significant unmet needs or safeguarding concerns.
- The final Pathway Plan provides detailed information about the young adult's continued leaving care entitlements, community services available to them and how to 'opt in' to leaving care support again in the future.
- Management oversight is recorded by the Team Manager on the Needs Assessment outlining why (or why not) the request to 'opt out' is agreed.
- Evidence that the final Needs Assessment and Pathway Plan have been shared with the young adult and their comments are recorded on LCS.
- If 'opt out' is agreed, a letter will be sent to the young adult from the Senior Manager to confirm and note their future entitlement of support, and how to get back in touch in the future and access leaving care services again, if they wish to or if their circumstances change.

2.5.2 Where the young adult is in education or training, the above process (5.1) is applied and a care planning meeting held with the senior manager before 'opt out' is agreed to consider any potential impact on the young adult's education or training, rights and entitlements and the statutory duties of the Leaving Care Service.

2.5.3 Where the conditions under 2.5.1 cannot be met or the young adult continually refuses support or does not respond to a high frequency of attempted contact over a considerable period of time despite a creative approach at various times (see Chapter 2.2), this will be **escalated to the Senior Manager for care planning** to which the young adult will be invited. The decision and rationale will be recorded on LCS by the Senior Manager in a case note. If 'opt out' is agreed, a letter will be sent to the young person from the Senior Manager to confirm and note their future entitlement of support, and how to get back in touch in the future and access leaving care services again if they wish to or if their circumstances change.

2.5.4 Where there is insufficient evidence to rule out significant unmet needs or safeguarding concerns following care planning with the senior manager and 'opt out' continues to be considered, this will be **escalated to the Head of Service for further care planning** to which the young adult will be invited. The right of privacy and to decline a service, the impact of trauma and vulnerability, mental capacity and professional duty of care will be carefully considered and balanced. The decision and rationale will be recorded on LCS by the Head of Service in a case note. If 'opt out' is

agreed, a letter will be sent to the young person from the Senior Manager to confirm and note their future entitlement of support, and how to get back in touch in the future and access leaving care services again if they wish to or if their circumstances change.

2.5.5 Where there are concerns that a young adult might not have mental capacity to make this decision, a Mental Capacity Assessment under the remit of the Mental Capacity Act 2005 must be undertaken. Should the outcome of this assessment be that the young adult lacks capacity to make this decision and requests to 'opt out', a Best Interests meeting will be arranged to make a multiagency Best Interest decision.

## **2.6 Re-referral to 'opt in' to Leaving Care Support and Annual Letter**

All of Lancashire's care leavers can 'opt in' to Leaving Care Support at any point prior to their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday by contacting Lancashire's customer access team on 0300 123 6720 and there is no threshold for any re-referral/request for support to be accepted. Those young adults who decided to 'opt out' prior to their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday will be made fully aware of this offer.

All care leavers who have 'opted out' of leaving care services prior to their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday will receive an annual letter informing them of the Local Offer to care leavers in Lancashire and how to get back in touch to access leaving care services again if they wish to or if their circumstances change. The letter will be sent to the last known home address and/or email address. A copy of the letter will be saved to documentum.

There are two letter templates available; one for when we are confident that we know where the young adult lives, and one if we are not certain of their address.

## **3. PRACTICE GUIDANCE FOR QUALIFYING CARE LEAVERS**

### **3.1 Qualifying care leavers under the age of 18**

For qualifying care leavers under the age of 18, case holding responsibility usually remains with the appropriate social work team and the joint working arrangements outlined for eligible young people apply.

### **3.2 Qualifying care leavers 18-25**

For qualifying care leavers over the age of 18, case holding responsibility is usually with the Leaving Care Team and practice guidance for relevant and former relevant care leavers applies except for chapter 2.5.

### **3.3 Ceasing Leaving Care Services for Qualifying Care Leavers aged 16-25 and Request for Support**

3.3.1 Where qualifying care leavers are actively provided with a service by Children's Social Care but not the Leaving Care Service, the leaving care service will work closely

with its teammates in the relevant social work teams to ensure services will not be ceased without the young person and their parent/carer knowing of their leaving care rights and entitlements.

3.3.2 Where qualifying care leavers are provided with a Leaving Care Service it will ensure that the young person knows of their leaving care rights and entitlements before services will be ceased.

3.3.3 Where Children's Services do not actively provide a service, for example to young people who reside with their SGO carer, a request for support has to be made by the young person, a person with parental responsibility or professional on their behalf with consent.

3.3.4 The Leaving Care Service will undertake an assessment guided by the principles of a Needs Assessment. The Leaving Care Team provides guidance, advice and support to qualifying care leavers based on assessed leaving care needs only. Some qualifying care leavers can present with the same level of leaving care needs as relevant or former relevant care leavers. However, where the assessed needs can be met by other services and no significant leaving care needs are identified, no leaving care services will be offered, and the young person's record be closed to the Leaving Care Service.

3.3.5 All qualifying care leavers can make a request for an assessment of their leaving care needs at any time up to their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday by contacting Lancashire's customer access team on 0300 123 6720.