**Care Leavers Protocol**

 **Joint Protocol Between**

**Jobcentre Plus and**

 **Medway Council**

**16+ Care Leavers Service**

**May 2024**

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**Background**

Care leavers are one of the most vulnerable groups of young people in society. 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. 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. In Medway we are committed to raising young people’s aspirations by providing on-going support to help them make positive decisions about their future.

**Aims of the Protocol**

Jobcentre Plus and Medway Council will work together to provide an enhanced service to support young people leaving care into education, employment and training. The protocol should be a living document that is reviewed by both parties, no less than quarterly. 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 route ways

**Consent to Share**

Under Universal Credit there is no implicit consent so Personal Advisers can only talk to the Department for Work and Pensions on a Care Leaver’s behalf if:

* They have the Care Leaver with them and attend the Jobcentre.
* They phone when they have the Care Leaver with them so they can answer the security questions posed and give verbal consent for DWP to speak to the Personal Adviser.
* The Care Leaver goes into their Universal Credit account and updates their journal with a message giving

1) The name of the 3rd party (Personal Adviser), organisation and their role.

2) What the query is about – it has to be specific e.g., housing costs for June 2019

3) Why the information is required

4) The 3rd party (Personal Adviser) should then be able to phone the Service Centre/ Jobcentre and DWP will discuss the issue.

* Written explicit consent from the Care Leaver for a particular enquiry.

**Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches will:**

* Provide an advanced claim process for care leavers
* Ensure that the young person is aware of all assistance available to them whilst claiming Universal Credit. The support includes:
	+ advance claim preparation, being able to prepare their claim up to 28 days before, entering details on their account (this cannot be submitted before their 18th birthday)
	+ being able to apply for Alternative Payment Arrangements at any point in their claim
	+ undertaking full-time non-advanced education
	+ access to Recoverable Hardship Payments
	+ help with accommodation costs and exemption from the Shared Accommodation rate, if they are under 25 years’ old
	+ Advance payments are available to care leavers in short term financial need
	+ access to the Work and Health Programme (a targeted contracted employment provision offering tailored support to help people find sustained work).
	+ help to find a job, work-related training or an apprenticeship though the Youth Offer, including referral to a Youth Employability Coach
* Make an entry in the claimant profile on the Universal Credit Service and pin a note. This note is to include –
	+ The fact that the young person is a care leaver
	+ Which local authority has looked after them
	+ Name and telephone number of their Personal Adviser and duty number for the 16+ Care Leavers Service
* The first time a care leaver fails to attend an appointment with Jobcentre, or any issues arise, the Work Coach will liaise with the care leaver’s Personal Adviser as well as the Jobcentre Work Coach Team Leader. This activity will be undertaken **before any sanction activity is considered.** This is in addition to any sense check undertaken before action is considered for failing to attend an interview.
* When required, organise a three-way case conference with the care leaver, 16+ Care Leavers Service and the Work Coach.
* Consider additional support for care leavers through the flexible support fund.

**Jobcentre Plus District Care Leaver lead will:**

* Provide details of a care leaver single point of contact for the Jobcentre and communicate any changes to these as they occur.
* Provide copies of the Third-Party escalation process for Kent and Medway Jobcentres and communicate any changes to these as they occur.
* Ensure that, when the ‘Rising 18’s’ list is received each quarter, any claim to Universal Credit is noted that the claimant is a care leaver, to prevent any discrepancies with UC Housing costs etc.

**The 16+ Care Leavers Service will:**

* Provide DWP with up-to-date contact details for the 4 teams attached to the 16+ Care Leavers Service.
* Ensure that young people are aware of the enhanced service they will receive from DWP.
* Ensure that all care leavers either have an effective and up to date CV or have the collated information to produce a CV with the Work Coach
* Ensure a warm handover in the form of a 3-way diagnostic interview, with the Leaving Care Personal Adviser, DWP Work Coach and the care leaver, at start of the claim for benefit.
* Re-iterate conditionality with the care leaver if / when the first infringement occurs.
* Where appropriate, the key worker will attend case conferencing to support the young person on their recommended pathway.
* Provide on-going support to the care leaver and liaison with the relevant Jobcentre, ensuring that DWP is notified of any changes in the young person’s circumstances, e.g., finishing education, a change of address or returning to parental home.
* Liaise with the Work Coach or Jobcentre Care Leaver Single Point of Contact if the young person does not appear to be making progress.
* Notifying Jobcentre Plus Kent of young people who are approaching age 18 and leaving care to a Medway or Kent address, by supplying a ‘Rising 18’s’ list to the Medway and Kent Jobcentre Care Leaver leads, on a quarterly basis.

**Summary**

Medway Council and DWP aim to support young people leaving care to access an enhanced service. It is hoped that working together supporting these young people, outcomes and aspirations will increase, enabling and empowering them to gain sustainable employment. The aim of this protocol is to support a young people leaving care to apply for Universal Credit prior to their 18th birthday. It is recognised that when care leavers first enter the benefit system, the complexity of the system combined with the complex issues faced by care leavers often result in lengthy payment delays for the young person and financial cost to the Local Authority in ‘holding payments’ paid to bridge the gap until benefits are in place.

Signed by DWP

Position Customer Service Leader for Chatham, Sittingbourne and Sheerness Jobcentres

Signature  Lyn Finch

Date 10.11.2023

Signed by Local Authority

Position Head of Corporate Parenting

Signature

Date 09/04/2024

**Universal Credit Claim Process**

The following process will be available to all Care Leavers.

**The Children in Care teams will:**

Six months **before** the care leavers 18th birthday the Social Worker will ensure that the care leaver has, or is working towards getting:

* Their National Insurance number.
* Two forms of identification including photographic ID, this could be a driving licence, birth certificate, a home office resident permit, passport.
* An email address – one for each person on the claim
* A bank account.
* A phone number
* A CV and a Find a Job account on gov.uk
* A current Pathway Plan that includes education, training and employment hopes for the future.
* Written confirmation that the care leaver is estranged and is just leaving care.
* Care leavers in full time education will need a letter from the college confirming course name, start and expected end date and hours of the course.

All of the above will need to be in place by the time the care leaver is 17 years and 11 months.

**Care leaver – advanced claim process for Universal Credit**

Care leavers can make an advanced claim to Universal Credit at <https://www.gov.uk/apply-universal-credit> up to **one month before their 18th birthday**. These claims must not be submitted until the claimant’s 18th birthday but can be viewed and checked by the DWP. Social Worker/PA to support Care Leaver to verify their ID using Gov.UK Verify if possible before turning 18yrs.

Social Worker/PA can assist young people to make their claim online and to book appointments.

The Social Worker (or Leaving Care Personal Adviser if post 18yrs) will then contact the appropriate Jobcentre contact to arrange the ‘pre-claim’ appointment to:

* confirm the claimant’s identification (Work Coach will access Confirm Identification for Care Leaver Agent Led Process (ALP))
* confirm bank account details (Work Coach will access the Confirm Bank Details for Care Leaver ALP)
* confirm the claimant is a care leaver (for example, written confirmation from the local authority on headed paper or by email, official paperwork relating to the claimant being in care).
* confirm housing situation by producing their tenancy agreement, proof of rent paid e.g., bank statement showing payment, and proof of residency e.g. A utility bill.
* book evidence and Claimant Commitment interview (on or as soon as possible after their 18th birthday)

The Work Coach will follow the Instructions for advanced claims Care Leaver (ALP).

Pre-claim interviews for care leavers are booked using the ‘Advance claim for care leaver’ appointment type.

The care leaver may bring a Social Worker or Personal Adviser with them to this appointment.

The following will also need to be discussed by Work Coach at the pre-claim meeting:

* Universal Credit payments are paid in arrears, a calendar month and 7 days from the date of claim.
* Alternative Payment Arrangements – split payments and/or managed payments of rent directly to the landlord.
* Advance Payment application

The Work Coach will book the Initial evidence interview (IEI)/ Claimant Commitment (CC) interview, so it is already arranged before the claim is submitted.

**On 18th Birthday**

On the 18th birthday the Care Leaver will log back into their on-line claim and the ‘submit’ button on the on-line claim should be pressed making the date of claim that day. The Social Worker should support the Care Leaver in doing this.

Once the claim has been made the Care Leaver will get a phone number to phone to arrange an appointment at the Jobcentre. Once this stage is reached the Care Leaver / Social Worker/Personal Adviser should contact the site SPOC for them to access the account and book the IE/Claimant Commitment interview to the slot already reserved. This must be within 7 days of their 18th Birthday.

At the interview, Work Coach to submit application for advance payment if required.

Please note that the Claimant Commitment interview has to be attended and the Claimant Commitment accepted after the interview in order to receive payment.

In order for the Personal Adviser to be able to assist the Care Leaver fully with their claim, the Care Leaver should give consent, with the following example wording:

*I give permission for my Personal Advisor ………………………. from the 16+ Care Leavers Service on 0xxx ……., to liaise with representatives from DWP via telephone or email and discuss issues regarding my claim to benefit and employment opportunities*

**Jobcentre Named Contacts**

Poppy Byrne, Medway Care Leaver lead poppy.byrne@dwp.gov.uk

Gemma Fill Medway Care Leaver lead gemma.fill@dwp.gov.uk

Nicola Collingwood Medway Care Leaver nicola.collingwood@dwp.gov.uk

Andrew Holmes Kent Care Leaver lead andrew.holmes2@dwp.gov.uk

Becky Waller, Medway Partnership Manager becky.waller@dwp.gov.uk

Lyn Finch, Medway Customer Service Leader lyn.finch@dwp.gov.uk

**Medway Council - 16+ Care Leavers Service Contacts**

Duty email: 16plus.duty@medway.gov.uk

16+ Care Leavers Service duty number: 01634 335681

Personal Advisor details:

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Craig Easterby - PA  | 335610  | 07773 207526  |
| Pam Pocock – PA  | 335630  | 07717 531454  |
| Natalie Wilson - PA  | 335665  | 07970 345045  |
| Katherine Alexis – PA  | 335674  | 07970349130  |
| Grace Omorogbeamu – PA  | 335718  | 07773 596 224  |
| Yasmin Salam – PA  | 335624  | 07970357061  |
| Danny Mooney - PA  | 331510  | 07547654214  |
| Bernadette Bradley – PA  | 334129  | 07773 189750  |
| Bola Akinsiku – PA  | 335564  | 07519 292955  |
| Keanna Kemsley – PA  | 335685  | 07816586237  |

# Key Contact for updating this protocol will be:

**Jobcentre Plus Kent**

Becky Waller – becky.waller@dwp.gov.uk. 07553 765 579

(Partnership Manager – Care Leaver lead for DWP in Medway)

**Medway Council**

Debbie Taylor , Service Manager, 16+ Service, debbie.taylor@medway.gov.uk

Appendix 1

Local Authority written confirmation of Care Leaver status



Appendix 2

List of Jobcentre Care Leaver Single Point of Contact