

Finance Policy

Looked After Young People 16+

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1. Introduction

The Finance Policy for Looked After Young People aged 16 years plus reflects the individual needs of young people including diversity and supports their emotional,

practical and financial transition to adulthood. It supports young people looked after in making life choices and maximising their allowances and the support available to them.

The Finance Policy for Looked After Young People aged 16 years plus should be read in conjunction with the Children's Social Care Finance Policy and Procedures and reference should be made to the Corporate Finance Procedures. Reference should also be made to the Care Leavers Offer, Guidance and Information available for Young People and their Carers which is included within this document.

The Authority has a duty to provide financial support to young people who are care leavers.

This policy sets out the financial assistance available to young people who are leaving care in order to support them to make informed decisions about their education, employment and training opportunities, to help them to achieve economic well-being and make a positive and successful transition to adulthood.

The Authority is the 'corporate parent' for young people looked after and leaving care and their role is to mirror the support a family would provide to their child, including offering a degree of flexibility depending upon the needs of the young person to ensure that they can become financially competent and capable when they reach adulthood. It is recognised that young people are individuals and will have differing needs.

This policy sets out the financial assistance available to young people who are leaving care. The specific financial support available to a young person will be based on the Assessment of Need that has been undertaken with the young person, parents, carers, extended family and all relevant professionals. The Assessment of Need will inform the Pathway Plan, which is completed for all Looked After Children. The Pathway Plan will specify the financial assistance available to the young person in accordance with this policy; including the conditions on which the financial assistance is made available, the frequency of and arrangements for payments, the sanctions to be applied should the financial assistance be abused and the process of reviewing progress against the Pathway Plan.

Financial Assistance Rates are calculated using Job Seekers Allowance, Boarding Out rates and regulatory financial allowances.

2. Legal Framework

The policy has been developed in accordance with:

- a) The Children's Act 1989
- b) The Children Leaving Care Act 2000
- c) The Children Act 2004
- d) The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations, Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers
- e) Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010

3. Definition of Who Is Eligible For Support

The Children Leaving Care Act 2000 created four categories of care leavers who are entitled to support after their sixteenth birthday. The extent of the Authority's financial responsibility towards a young person will be determined according to these categories.

Eligible Young Person: - An eligible young person is one who:

- Is aged 16 or 17
- Has been looked after by the local authority for a period of at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 (some of this period being after their 16th or 17th birthday)

Relevant Young Person: - A relevant young person is one who was previously an eligible young person but who is no longer looked after and is under the age of 18.

Former Relevant Young Person: - A former relevant young person is one who has reached the age of 18 but not 21 and who was eligible and / or relevant prior to becoming 18. Where a young person is being supported with education or training they remain a former relevant young person to the end of the agreed programme, even where that takes the young person beyond the age of 21.

Qualifying Young Person: - A qualifying young person is one who doesn't meet the criteria for being an eligible young person but who is or was a looked after young person

for example where a young person has no parent to turn to for help or where the parent does not have the capacity to provide assistance. Young People can be deemed 'Qualifying' for example as a result of being looked after immediately prior to becoming subject to a Special Guardianship Order or subject to a private fostering arrangement.

4. Financial Support for Eligible Young People Who Remain Looked After In Placement

- Accommodation

Eligible young people who remain in their foster placement or residential care placement will have their accommodation costs met by the Authority. They will continue to receive Birthday and Festivities Allowances.

- Education, Employment and Training

Eligible young people will be supported to pursue education, training and employment. The Government's 16-19 Bursary Fund provides a bursary per year to young people in care and care leavers and it is expected that transport, meals, books and equipment costs will be met from this bursary. Young people will be assisted by their allocated worker to apply for a bursary from the relevant school, college or training provider.

- Additional Financial Support

As specified in a young person's Pathway Plan, financial support may also be available to assist with the cost of: -

- Maintaining contact with family and significant others;
- Social activities, hobbies and cultural activities / outings;
- Maintaining a young person's cultural and religious needs;
- Obtaining important documents associated with identity i.e. birth certificate and one additional form of identification.
- Transport costs not related to education, employment, training or contact arrangements, but which are specified within the Assessment of Need and Pathway Plan, taking consideration of the young person's individual circumstances.

Eligible young people may be entitled to membership of the Authority's Leisure centres which will enable them to use specified leisure facilities within the borough. The extent

to which facilities are used will be monitored and the Authority may withdraw membership if usage levels are low.

5. Financial Support for Eligible and Relevant Young People Living Independently

- Accommodation

The Authority will fund the cost of appropriate accommodation for young people up to the age of 18 yrs.

Young people who are earning an income, or are in receipt of means tested benefits will be expected to make a contribution towards their accommodation and maintenance and this will be discussed and agreed as part of the young person's Pathway Plan.

Young people with a disability may be entitled to additional benefits and these are taken into consideration when undertaking the means tested benefit assessment.

Where a young person has received a Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) payment, they will be supported in seeking independent financial advice.

- Education, Employment and Training

Eligible and relevant young people will be supported to pursue education, training and employment. The Government's 16-19 Bursary Fund provides a bursary per year to young people in care and care leavers and it is expected that transport, meals, books and equipment costs will be met from this bursary. Young people will be assisted to apply for a bursary from the relevant school, college or training provider.

- Additional Financial Support

The Authority will maintain eligible and relevant young people who live independently by giving them a maintenance allowance, equivalent to the prevailing Job Seekers Allowance benefit rate for a single person under the age of 25.

Eligible and relevant young people who live independently are entitled to Birthday, Festivities and Clothing Allowances.

Financial support will be made available to young people to assist with costs associated with special needs such as disability and pregnancy. These will be identified as part of the young person's Assessment of Need and agreed as part of the Pathway Plan.

As specified in a young person's Pathway Plan, financial support may also be available to assist with the cost of : -

- Maintaining contact with family and significant others;
- Social activities, hobbies and cultural activities / outings;
- Maintaining a young person's cultural and religious needs;
- Obtaining important documents associated with identity ie birth certificate and one additional form of identification.
- Transport costs not related to education, employment, training or contact arrangements, but which are specified within the Assessment of Need and Pathway Plan, taking consideration of the young person's individual circumstances.

Eligible and Relevant young people living independently may be entitled to membership of the Authority's Leisure centres which will enable them to use specified leisure facilities within the borough. The extent to which facilities are used will be monitored and the Authority may withdraw membership if usage levels are low.

6. Financial Support for Former Relevant Young People

Once a young person reaches the age of 18 years they are able to claim the same range of benefits as other adults. Former relevant young people will be advised by their allocated worker regarding claims for their housing benefit and will be responsible for their own rent and household bills. Support will be made available to young people as identified in their Pathway Plan, to maximise their income from benefits, education and training allowances and employment.

- Accommodation

Support will be given to young people to assist them to apply for suitable housing in order to meet their needs.

A young person may be eligible to continue to reside with their foster carers beyond the age of 18 in accordance with the Authority's Staying Put Policy.

Financial support may be available in respect of accommodation costs (e.g. a deposit or bond in relation to rented accommodation) where such support is not available from other sources. In addition, a bursary may be available towards the cost of the course. The level of financial support will be discussed and agreed as part of the young person's Pathway Plan.

The Authority will fund the cost of appropriate vacation accommodation for Former relevant young people who are in higher education where the young person is not eligible to claim relevant benefits or is not in receipt of any other source of income.

- Education, Employment and Training

Support and advice will be provided to assist young people wishing to pursue education and training opportunities. The Government's 16-19 Bursary Fund provides a bursary per year to young people in care and care leavers and it is expected that transport, meals, books and equipment costs will be met from this bursary. Young people will be assisted to apply for a bursary from the relevant school, college or training provider.

Financial support may be available in respect of education materials, equipment, specific clothing and transport where such support is not available from other sources. In addition, a bursary may be available towards the cost of the course. The level of financial support will be discussed and agreed as part of the young person's Pathway Plan.

- Additional Financial Support

Former relevant young people will receive a Birthday Allowance on their 18th birthday in line with eligible and relevant young people. In addition, a Festivities Allowance will be

paid on the first Festival following their 18th birthday. Former relevant young people in custody who would otherwise have received the allowance will receive the allowance if they are released within 3 months of their 18th birthday.

The Authority will assist former relevant young people in respect of driving lessons subject to the following criteria: -

- The young person is at least 18 years of age;
- The young person is engaged in full-time education, employment or training;
- There is no assessed misuse of drugs or alcohol in respect of the young person;
- Driving lessons will be delivered through an approved provider and arranged by the Authority;
- The number of lessons provided will not exceed 20;
- The cost of one driving test (theory and practical) will be met by the Authority.

The Authority will not fund the cost of any additional tests that may be required.

Former relevant young people will be entitled to membership of the Authority's Leisure Centres which will enable them to use specified leisure facilities within the borough. The extent to which facilities are used will be monitored and the Authority may withdraw membership if usage levels are low.

7. Financial Assistance to Qualifying Young People

The primary financial support role for qualifying young people is the responsibility of the Department for Work and Pensions. In exceptional circumstances the Authority may provide financial assistance where this is deemed necessary to protect the welfare of the young person and where it cannot be made available by any other agency. An assessment of need will be undertaken to establish whether the qualifying young person requires advice and assistance and a plan developed with the young person outlining the support to be provided. The plan would be recorded as a Pathway Plan.

The Local Authority may consider financial assistance where this is connected with the young person's employment, education or training for example where the young person is in full time further or higher education, is under 25 years of age and qualifies for advice and assistance, or would have done if they were under 21 years, in relation to

securing vacation accommodation. Additionally disabled young people who have been provided with short term breaks may be in need of financial assistance for example in respect of high communication needs.

8. Setting Up Home Allowance

In line with the Government's Care Leaver Strategy – A Cross Departmental Strategy for Young People Leaving Care, October 2013, The Setting Up Home Allowance has been increased to £2,000 in line with the recommendations made. This allowance will be made available to eligible, relevant and former relevant young people to assist them in setting up their own home.

The allowance will be provided to children and young people to ensure appropriate equipment and household items are obtained. Young People will be supported in respect of the Setting Up Home Allowance to maximise their choices about how they furnish their homes and maximise their allowance. The level of support required will be identified within the Assessment of Need and Pathway Plan and may not always involve a Personal Advisor accompanying the young person. Information has been developed for young people advising them of the arrangements in respect of the Setting Up Home Allowance.

In addition to the Setting Up Home allowance, a further allowance may be provided where the young person is a parent of a child who is under the age of one year at the time the young person moves into the accommodation and where the child resides with the young person. The allowance is to assist with the additional household needs of a baby / child and may be paid if no such assistance is available from the Benefits Agency.

The Local Authority recognises that the first move a Young Person makes may not be successful and therefore may require additional support second time around. The DfE highlights that local authorities should 'make sure that young people are provided with the opportunities they need, which will include offering them more than one chance as they grapple with taking on the responsibilities of adulthood'. Guidance in respect of such circumstances has been included in the Care Leavers Offer.

9. Incentive Scheme

The authority has identified all financial support young people are entitled to and ensures that this is paid in a timely manner and to all young people meeting the eligibility criteria.

The authority wishes to encourage and facilitate all young people looked after and leaving care to maximise their life chances by engaging in education, employment and training and to enjoy social and physical activities. In order to support and encourage young people the authority may consider the use of incentives or rewards in respect of achievement. Any such incentive or reward would be agreed with the Young Person and their carer and be included in the Pathway Plan, and be reviewed on a regular basis. Where the incentive or reward is not operating as anticipated, the Personal Advisor will work with the young person to identify changes and review / update the Pathway Plan accordingly. The Pathway Plan will also clearly indicate under what circumstances such incentives or rewards may be suspended or removed.

10. Emergency Assistance

The Authority may also provide emergency funds to assist a young person in exceptional circumstances where this is deemed necessary. Such assistance will only be made available when other possibilities have been considered and where the young person has taken all reasonable steps to remedy the particular situation. The Local Authority will ensure that all alternative support mechanisms have been explored including Food Bank Vouchers, and will purchase the required items rather than provide cash.

Advice and guidance will be available to a young person to ensure he / she does not become reliant on emergency assistance and they will be supported with debt advice and management. Finance and budget management is a significant part of the Assessment of Need and Pathway Plan which is reviewed on regular basis. All young people looked after are supported in opening a Bank account and where possible all allowances are paid through their account.

11. Complaints

All complaints from young people will be dealt with as per the authorities complaint procedures and taken seriously. The outcome of complaints from young people will be referred to the Corporate Parenting Board for consideration and to inform learning and development.

All complaints from young people looked after will be shared with the Complaints officer.

If a young person is not happy with the Assessment of Need or Pathway Plan in respect of the financial support offered to them, they should attempt to resolve the disagreement through their social worker or their Team Manager, who will respond within 14 days.

If the complaint cannot be resolved in this way the young person can make a complaint via the Authority's Complaints Procedure.

Where the complaint relates to a proposed change to a pathway plan, the young person's accommodation or a service they are receiving, the decision may need to be deferred or frozen until the complaint has been considered.

The young person can access advocacy via The Children's Rights Officer at any stage and is provided with advice and information regarding this service by their allocated worker and in Statutory Reviews.

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