

Keeping on Caring

2018-2020



**A guide for young adults
leaving care in Bexley**

Welcome

Welcome! – This hand book for young adults leaving care in Bexley (sometimes called care leavers) has been developed with input from our Positive Journeys Seniors, a group of young adults who are care experienced in Bexley. It is sometimes known as a care leaver’s forum.

When you became ‘looked after’ in Bexley we committed that we would make your experiences as ‘good for you’ as they could be. The same is true for you now as a young adult leaving our care. Please do try to get involved with our Positive Journeys Senior Group. It is a really important opportunity for us to help you and for you to share your thoughts about how well we are helping and supporting you.

We hope this booklet will help to guide you through the big changes in your lives as you move into adulthood. If you have been a looked after child in Bexley, and you have reached the age of 18 you ‘leave care’, but the local authority will still support and care for you. This booklet tries to explain what this will mean.

We understand that maybe some of the stuff in this handbook will not interest you all the time! It is here for you when you do need it though, so tuck it away somewhere safe. As young adults leaving the care of Bexley, you should expect the same level of care and support that other young people would normally receive from their birth parents.

Our Young people tell us that becoming 18 years old and becoming a ‘care leaver’ can be scary, as well as being an exciting time so, it’s important you have the help and support you need to make sure you feel safe, cared for and able to manage your adult life.

The first page of this guide is for you to be able to keep a record of important things you have spoken to your Personal Adviser (PA) about and, as a result, hopefully, now understand well. Please use this guide to support your questions or worries as you move into this important new time in your life. This guide gives you the basic information that you need to be able to make decisions about the help you need and the support we can offer you. There are sections at the back with fuller information on how we can support you. Please read these through with your PA before signing them off at the front document. Thank you for taking the time to read our guide.



Jacky Tiotto
Director of Children’s Services



Councillor Philip Read
Cabinet Member for Children’s Services



IT IS OUR
JOB.....

TO CREATE
GREATNESS
IN OTHERS

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Care leavers covenant

The London Borough of Bexley expect all young adults leaving care to have the same opportunities with education, employment and training as children growing up in their birth families. In fact, Bexley have made this very pledge a specific priority in the looked after and care leaver strategy, 'a mile in my shoes'. Read on for exciting news!

Have you heard about The care leaver covenant? www.my covenant.org.uk

The covenant is a pledge made by public, private and voluntary organisations to support all young adults leaving care to be successful. What does this mean I hear you say? – Well, in a nutshell, it details many exciting opportunities for young adults leaving care to apply for from employment work with placements and internships with big businesses, government departments, museums, theatres, or Premier League football clubs, as well as training workshops or life-skills coaching.

In addition to the private and voluntary sector offers of support, the package of support for young adults leaving care includes:

- 12-month internships from every government department in Whitehall, including 100 12-month internships from January 2019;
- Support from universities, such as bursaries and accommodation, with Cambridge, Leeds, and Manchester universities committing to supporting care leavers – data shows that only 6 per cent of care leavers aged 19 to 21 go on to higher education; and
- Resources and tools from Barclays Life Skills to help care leavers to manage their money better, as they often lack the safety net of financial support from their families.

Watch this space for developments on this and how Bexley expect to be able to 'offer' young adults leaving care local opportunities.

It could not be easier to access, either through the free app, care leaver covenant on the app store www.itunes.apple.com/gb/app/care-leaver-covenant-app/id1438761894?mt=8, online here, or through your PA.



Our Commitment to you

Our Commitments in Bexley:

Getting ready for adulthood:

- We will help you with the changes that happen when you stop being a child who is 'looked after' and become a young adult leaving care. We will do this in a supportive and positive way, making sure that you have the time it takes to be ready.
- We will help you remain with your foster family for as long as possible. We will only start thinking about independent living with you when you are practically, mentally and emotionally ready.
- We will help you maintain relationships with your carers, family, friends and social networks so that you have help and support during and after you leave our care.
- We will help you to understand what you need to be able to successfully live on your own and to be happy. We will also show you that we understand that leaving our care is a big step and that you need our patience and understanding, even when you make mistakes.

Practical help

- We will make it our priority to help you to find and keep a safe and welcoming home. We will make sure that you understand and take part in making your personal housing plan.
- We will help you learn how to take care of yourself, stay healthy and safe, manage your money, take care of your home, go to school, college or university, find a job, and have good relationships, able to raise families of your own if that is what you would like to do.
- We will understand that just because you become 18, this does not mean you will suddenly know all there is to know about being a responsible adult. We will help you to work out what being a responsible adult means, support you when you make mistakes and when we feel worried about you. We will make sure especially during the tough times, that we stand ready to help you.
- We will make sure that we see you every month (more regularly if we can) and more often when you first leave our care. We respect your choice to see us less if that is what you would like.
- We will help you to understand how to deal with conflicts and challenges without getting angry and frustrated at others or making things worse. We will help you through our own example, being patient and understanding. When things don't go according to plan, we will help you make a plan B to fall back upon.
- We understand that as an adult you may make choices that are not good for you and may even mean that you are unsafe. We know that you are free to make such a choice, but we will always act to help you to protect yourselves and others around you. There may be times that we need to make contact with other services or people who can help you. If we need to do this, we will make sure that you know and are clear about what will happen next.
- We will help you to find special support, like therapy or counselling, when the time is right for you and if you tell us that this would help you.

- We will make sure that you feel part of our Bexley “Corporate family” and like other families, we understand that you need to have a sense that you belong and are valued. We will help other people in the Council understand this when you may need their support, for example with housing or other services.

Our relationship together

- We will always help you dream and aspire to be better than you are today.
- We will help you to believe that you will continue to grow and to succeed.
- Your pathway plan will be something that inspires you to achieve great things in your life, whatever that means for you.
- We will always listen to you, even when we don’t agree with one another.
- We will hear you out and help you to speak your mind in a way that helps you be heard by others who need to listen.
- We will include you in all of the important decisions that need to be made about your life and your future.
- We will respect the times when you need some personal space or may not be ready to see or speak with us. We will always leave the door open so that you know you can seek us out when you are ready to receive our help or advice. You will receive help and support from us up until the age of 25.
- We will make sure that your current social worker or Personal Adviser does not leave you without saying goodbye and introducing you to the new adult who will be supporting you. All our new Personal Advisers will understand that getting to know you and to earn your trust will take time.

- We will help you identify the triggers that may lead you to become angry, lash out, hurt yourself or turn to drugs or alcohol to cope. We will help you plan for these situations and identify who you can turn to for help when you need it. If it is helpful, we will help you to make a safety plan so that you have some control at times when you feel vulnerable and worried.
- We will not make commitments to you unless we know we can honour them. We know that our honesty will be important if you are to trust and work with us. That may mean that sometimes we have to say things to you even when it may not be what you want or like to hear.
- We will help you to understand your history and how it is you came to be in our care. We recognise that having your life story book, pictures and mementoes are all important to your recalling important people and events in your life. We will support you if you find this upsetting and if you want to see your case files, we will make sure that your Personal Adviser is available to help you read through papers and to ask questions.
- We will make sure that you understand your rights and your responsibilities. This will include knowing who else can help you to express your views if you want to make a complaint because you feel you have been treated unfairly. If we are not able to keep these commitments to you, we understand that this will mean you may need to complain.
- We will always offer you a hug or a shoulder to cry on if that will help. It’s ok for you to say no though!



Your commitments to us

- So that we can have the best relationship together through these commitments, we ask that you try your very best to:
- Treat us with respect, even when you don't agree with suggestions we are making
- Keep in touch with us as much as you can or feel comfortable with
- Listen to and think about our advice and guidance, even if you don't always follow it
- Let us know if you feel we are treating you unfairly or if we have made a mistake. We would like a chance to make things right
- Accept our support, and let us know when you don't want or need our help
- Understand that we have to make decisions about your safety when the law says we must or when you are in danger
- Apologise and take responsibility for your actions when you make mistakes
- Keep working hard on your goals, dreams and ambitions to the best of your ability
- Be open and honest with us as much as possible
- Tell us what your views, wishes and feelings are on anything we do to help
- Let us know if you are in trouble or making decisions that are not good for you

Personal Advisers - Moving from being looked after to becoming a young adult leaving care – please sign off this section once you have worked through the sections in full. Hopefully this will mean things are clearer and you know what to do if you are stuck!

Personal Advisers

As a Care Leaver you will have a co-allocated Personal Adviser (PA) from the Leaving Care Team from the age of 16 ½ years. Your Social Worker, your Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) and your Personal Adviser will start to talk with you about a new plan for your future, called 'a pathway plan'. This plan will set out the things you need as you prepare to live your life independently when you are 18 years old. Your pathway plan must be an important part of your journey to leaving our care and we will help you write it so that you understand the support you have as you make decisions about where you will live, the job you do or the education and training you want to continue.

Your social worker and Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) who know you well, will remain responsible, with you, for your pathway plan until you are 18. In the year and a half whilst we support you to prepare for your 18th birthday, we really hope that a new and important relationship will develop with your Personal Adviser.

They will become an important adult in your life until you are 25 years old. Please do think of your pathway plan as being so important as a guide for you, that you have a shorter copy on your fridge or somewhere you can see it regularly so that you stay hopeful about your future!

How will I be involved?

For your Pathway Plan to be effective it will be based on your current needs, setting out the support that will be offered to you to achieve your aspirations.

As already mentioned, you will be fully involved in the development of the Plan and you will be offered support from your PA, your Social Worker and your IRO to express your wishes and views for your pathway plan review meetings as well.

What will be included in my pathway plan?

- Relationships and Support
- Accommodation arrangements
- Education, Training and Employment
- Health and Development
- Independent Living Skills
- Family and Social Networks

More information can be accessed on page 18

Money

Please sign off this section once you have worked through the full sections.

Signed

Signed PA

Getting used to managing your own money, paying bills and having enough money left over to live on in-between payments can be hard to get used to. Your PA is here to support you through this. You will be expected, when you are 18 years old, to either be working or be in education or training.

The salary or payments you receive will be the money you are expected to budget from. If, as a last resort, you need to claim welfare benefits, your PA will support you with the process. Please see full information on page 17/18

Housing

Please sign off this section once you have worked through the full sections.

Signed

Signed PA

Having a safe and welcoming home is important for you and your PA is ready to help you discuss your housing options. It may be that you stay with your current foster carers, move into a semi-independent home, or a flat of your own. Please read page 15 for more information.



Education, employment and training

Please sign off this section once you have worked through the full sections.

Signed

Signed PA

Our ambitions for you are high. We will help you in any way we can to access the right educational, employment or training options for you. Please read page 18 for information on how we can support you.

Relationships

Please sign off this section once you have worked through the full sections.

Signed

Signed PA

Relationships with our family and friends can help us to stop feeling lonely, have a safe base upon which to have a sense of belonging and a network of people we can rely on when times are good or not so good. However, it is sometimes hard to resolve conflicts that arise with all relationships. Your PA will support you through this. Please read page 13 for more details.

Hobbies and community activities

Please sign off this section once you have worked through the full sections.

Signed

Signed PA

You may have outside interests that you have been doing since you were younger, or have ideas on a new hobby you wish to consider. Speak to your PA about this and they will support you to find out more.

Please read page 20 for more details.



Local Authorities have a duty to provide services and support to children who are looked after or young adults leaving care, as set out in the Children Act 1989 and the Children and Social Work Act 2017. Below is a guide to the legal framework. This may be tricky to work out but do not worry as your Personal Adviser can talk this through with you in more detail.

What does the law say about young adults leaving care?

You are a
Eligible
Care Leaver if:

E

- You are currently looked after;
- Aged 16 or 17; and
- You have been looked after for a period of 13 weeks (or periods amounting to 13 weeks) which began after you reached 14 and ended after you reached 16.

You are a
Relevant
Care Leaver if:

R

- You are no longer being looked after by the Local Authority but you have been 'Eligible';
- Aged 16 or 17 years old;
- Immediately before being detained or in hospital you were 'Eligible'
OR
- Lived for continuous period of 6 months or more with parent, someone with parental responsibility and where those arrangements break down

You are a
Former Relevant
Care Leaver if:

FR

- You are aged 18 years or above, and either have been a Relevant or Eligible child when under 18.
- If at the age of 21 or before reaching the age of 25 you are in education or training, then you will remain a former relevant child until the end of the agreed programme.
- If after 21 years you inform us that you want to pursue or are pursuing a programme of education or training

You are a
Qualifying
Care Leaver if:

YPQ

- You are at least 16 but under 21; and
- You were looked after immediately prior to the making of a special guardianship order which was in force when you reached 18; or
- If at any time after you reached the age of 16 but while you were still a child was, but is no longer looked after, accommodated or fostered; or
- You were privately fostered and assessed to be in need.
- As a Qualifying Care Leaver you are able to access advice and assistance based on a needs assessment completed by the Leaving Care Team

Being a young adult leaving care in Bexley will be good for you if we can:

- Help you remain with a foster family (if you are already living with that family after becoming 18) until you are 21 years of age or older.
- Supporting you to move to semi-independence or full independence only when you are practically, mentally and emotionally ready to make this happen.
- Promote and maintain your positive relationships with your carers, family and social networks.
- Prepare you to be ready to leave care by supporting you to develop practical self-care and life skills, understanding how to care for your health, budgeting, domestic skills and personal and professional relationships.
- Maximise the education, training and employment opportunities for you so that you can live independently and have good choices and opportunities as a young adult.
- Ensure that you have access to a safe and 'homely' home which will be a good match for your individual needs.
- Ensure that there is someone to support you in the event of a crisis or when things do not go according to plan.
- Provide ongoing personal support until you are 25. This will include the support of a specialist leaving care social worker or Personal Adviser, support from Bexley Council's training and career services and the support from a specialist education and employment adviser.
- Involve you in a meaningful way when preparing your pathway plan with you. The pathway plan will have your voice throughout and will detail your hopes and dreams as well as the day to day stuff that we all need to do like register with a GP, offer good advocacy support and help you to make a complaint if you need to.

What help is there for me?

You can expect the following:

Your Personal Adviser will listen to you and help you with decisions that will affect your future - you will be provided with the information and support required to help you make decisions about where you are going to live, what you are going to do and how we are going to support you to look after yourself. This means:

- You will meet a Personal Adviser when you are 16 ½ years old and you will begin to decide with them, your independent reviewing officer (IRO) and your social worker how they will support you on your journey to young adulthood and beyond.
- We will, together with you, develop an individual Pathway Plan which clearly states your aspirations, your housing, education, employment, training and financial arrangements.
- We will make sure that your 'money' plan enables you to pay rent, bills, travel and have enough to spend on food and personal care.
- Provide you with somewhere safe to live and help you make it your home.
- Support you with education, training and employment opportunities.
- Help you to be lead a healthy life.
- Provide you with a health passport which will include your health history and health needs.
- Ensure you have a passport, national insurance number and birth certificate.
- Ensure we listen to you and share with you clearly what you can do if you are not happy about something.
- We will help you with contact with your family if you want this and it is safe for this to happen. Obviously as an adult, you are free to make your own choices, but we will help you to think about what the best options are.
- We will offer you support if you would like to see your files that set out your history and what we know about you and your family.

What I need to know

We will support you to return safely to your family if you would like this to happen and it is safe enough for this to be possible.

Family and Friends

Family Relationships, Community and Support Networks

Many of our young adults will have a positive relationship with their parents and family and want this to continue after becoming a leaving care. You may also have close friends that you are anxious to stay in contact with. Do not worry, we understand how important these relationships are and will support you to stay in touch where possible.

Family connections are important. You may wish to see your parents or family members more often. You may want to have set arrangements for when you will be seeing brothers and or sisters and other family members. Your PA will support you with this, and will detail your plans in your pathway plan.

We will support you with:

- Considering the changes your family have made to make life at home better for you.
- Working with you and your family to help strengthen your relationship.
- Making sure you have a trusted adult you can talk to.
- Agreeing with you and your parents, in writing, what needs to happen before and after you return home if you are under 18 years.
- Providing support to you and your family before and after you return home if you are under 18 years.
- If you are over 18 years, we will offer help to make sure that reuniting with your family is a good experience but we are not able to offer services specifically for them.
- Keeping in close contact to see how you and your family are doing and offering support where needed.

Who will support you?

Bexley's Leaving Care teams are here to help support you as you learn to live more independently. Your Personal Adviser will help you to make positive and ambitious plans for your future.



Your relationship with your Personal Adviser is really important. We hope you will know each other for a long time. Changes to your Personal Advisers should only be made with your agreement.

However, in exceptional circumstances and where this is not possible (i.e. long term illness or the Personal Adviser changing jobs), we will help you manage the changes by giving you as much notice and planning as possible. We will be sure to communicate clearly and respectfully if this important adult in your life changes.

Your Personal Adviser will help you to develop and work with a support network which may include family, friends, cultural or religious organisations, and other support services or professionals.

Visits and support

Your Personal Adviser will visit you as frequently as you need to give you the maximum amount of support. In Bexley, Personal Advisers are asked to visit you every month and more regularly when you first move into your new home.

You can, of course, ask us to visit less often, but we don't think that for most young adults this is in their best interests at such an important time. You will have a telephone number for your Personal Adviser and there is someone from the Service on duty every day. We hope you will enjoy making contact, and we will make sure that you can contact someone at all times.

Contact telephone number for Duty Personal Adviser team – 0203 0455048

Pathway Plans and Reviews

Your pathway plan (written with you) will

- Tell you who your PA is and how you can contact them
- Help you find a safe and secure home
- Support your important relationships

- Make sure health needs are met
- Support access to education, training or employment
- Help to assess and understand what money will be available for you to live on
- Tell you everything you need to live as an independent adult
- Everything you feel is important !

Please see page 14/15 for full details

What if I need immigration support?

You may be a young adult leaving our care who was or is an unaccompanied asylum seeking child and have an application with the Home Office which is under consideration for asylum and refugee status. Sometimes, these applications can take a long time, sometimes years, to process, during which time you will not have permanent status in the UK nor be able to work or receive regular benefits. However, you may be entitled to support from the care leavers service including funding for housing, subsistence, healthcare and prescriptions. It will be important that these considerations are planned with you as much in advance as possible before you reach 18 years of age. You can ask your Personal Adviser for further information on the support you are entitled to and how to appeal immigration decisions.

If your leave to remain status is approved, this will normally last for five years and can be subject to regular review. It will also grant you the right to work and claim benefits. A further discretionary leave to remain can also be granted for a three-year period, and is also subject to review.

As part of your pathway plan, it will be important to talk about what happens if your asylum application is denied. The Personal Adviser will explore the appeals routes as well as what happens if you are facing deportation and how this may need to be planned.

If your asylum application is refused, there is an appeal process you will want to consider which your PA will support you with.

If your appeal rights are exhausted, we can continue to financially support you for up to a further 21 days and support you emotionally and practically to consider your options. The important thing to remember is that we will not abandon you.

Where will I live?

One of the most important decisions we must agree with you as a Young Adult leaving our care is where you are going to live. It is very important that wherever you live, it is safe and feels like a home.

Your PA is here to help you with this, working through the options available to you and helping you to decide on what will be best for you at that time. All plans for where you live will need to be included in your Pathway Plan and agreed at your reviews.

If you are living with foster carers and want to stay there after you become 18, if both you and the foster carer agree, we will support you to remain there. This is called 'Staying Put'. A Staying Put arrangement refers to a situation where a young person who has been looked after for a total of at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, and remained looked after on or after their 16th birthday remains living with their foster carer with whom they were placed when they turn 18. It requires Local Authorities to facilitate, monitor and support staying put arrangements for fostered young people until they reach the age of 21. The principle guiding the new legislation is to offer such young adults, the option to remain living with their foster carers until they feel ready to move onto live independently.

If you have been living in a residential care environment like a children's home, we will help you to stay in touch with special adults there. We will usually try to help you to live locally in Bexley, so you may see less of them but this is something you could write into your pathway plan if it is important to you.

Having somewhere, warm and safe to live is very important. If you were living in a family with your parents, it is unlikely you would move away to live alone at the young age of 18 years old. That is why in Bexley, we will encourage you to stay living with the carers you know, or very close by, so that you have good support.

We will worry about whether you are ready to live alone and we will discuss it together a lot. Your pathway plan will make very clear what is good for you and how we are going to manage this together.

We want it to be 'good for you' so this is one of the most important things about your future planning!



Young Adults leaving care who have a special need and or disability

Your social worker in the Children with Disabilities Team will make a referral to the Preparation for Adulthood Team when you are 14 years old. Both social workers will attend your annual Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) review meeting. At the EHCP review meeting, social workers will help you to start thinking about your future hopes, plans, where you would want to live and how to manage your finances in future. Social workers will come to other EHCP review meetings every year and the focus will be to help you as you become an independent young adult. The Preparation for Adulthood social worker will complete a draft Needs Led Assessment when you are 16 years old and this will be updated when you are 17. Your social worker will always share the assessment with you, your carers and family. This will help you understand the support you may need when you become 18. In some circumstances we know you may need help to make decisions, because of your special need or disability, we refer to this as your capacity to make decisions.

Capacity assessments may be completed at the age of 16 years and if it is deemed that you need help with your capacity to make decisions on a specific issue we will ensure that this is always in your 'Best Interests'. Decisions about Mental Capacity will be made on an individual basis, and may vary according to the nature of the decision.

We want you to get to know and have a Personal Adviser from the age of 16½ years old who will work with you, your social workers, the Independent Reviewing Officer, your carer and your family, in planning your journey into adulthood and beyond. The Personal Adviser will assist you in completing your pathway plan which will be reviewed regularly until the age of 25.

Your health

You will receive a 'Health passport' which details your health history. Keep this safe for when you may need it. At the back of this book there are useful contacts of organisations which registering with the GP or a dentist. It is important that you take care of yourself and speak to your PA about any health concerns you may have. Your pathway plan will also detail any health needs that you may have, remember to keep your PA updated.

Your options for where you can live once you are 18

Include:

- Staying put - please see page 15 for further details, this is where you stay in your foster family/carers.
- Supported accommodation - perhaps a shared house or flat, where you have your own room but share some facilities with other young people and receive support from a housing support officer. Supported lodgings might also be an option. This is sharing with an adult who will be there to help if you need it, but who will also be able to support you to live independently in their home.
- Independent accommodation from— housing association or a privately rented landlord.
- Returning to live with your family.
- When you are ready, a permanent home with either a social housing or private housing tenancy will be considered. Your legal status as a 'Care Leaver' gives you the right to be accepted on to the housing list, however, it is important that this does not happen until you feel able to live completely on your own and manage the responsibilities like paying all your bills on time. We can plan for this when we are writing your pathway plan. We will make sure your name is on Bexley's housing register from the age of 18 years old.
- Moving to live on your own is a massive step; it's not just about paying bills and cooking your own food. It's also about staying healthy and getting on with your neighbours. Your social worker/Personal Adviser will talk to you as part of the pathway planning process about the best ways for this to be a success that lasts.

STABILITY & RELATIONSHIPS

- ‘Moving in Day’ – We will be there to make sure everything goes smoothly on your moving in day. We realise this can be an exciting but also scary time, your PA will be there with you every step of the way for emotional and practical support. We will help you settle in and make sure all practical things are in place such as water, gas and electricity’.



Money

Although you may still receive some financial support once you are 18, you will be expected to find your income from work, education grants and, if eligible, benefits. In most instances, we will not be responsible for your daily living costs.

Of course, we will not forget your birthdays and you will receive a birthday allowance from us up until you are 25 years old with your special 21st birthday marked with a meal for you and your Personal Adviser. There are of course also Christmas and other religious festivals that you may celebrate. We will mark these special times with a gift and, where possible, a visit

Claiming benefits, if that is what you need, is not simple and you need to ensure you apply for everything you are entitled to. Your Personal Adviser will be able to help you with this. You will need identification documents and a bank account (if you don't already have one) for the benefits to be paid. Your PA will help you to get these in place before your 18th birthday, and support you to apply for your benefits before your birthday so that everything is set up to reduce any delays in payments. If you are receiving benefits and find yourself in a 'sanction' from the DWP, which usually means that you will receive no money, you should contact your Personal Adviser urgently.

Debt and money worries can have a serious impact on your well-being. In Bexley, we would want to know as soon as you start to worry about having enough money. At that moment, WE WILL HELP YOU. We won't be able to give you more money than you are entitled to. BUT we will find ways for your life and living arrangements to be manageable. DO NOT LEAVE THESE WORRIES UNRESOLVED. GET IN TOUCH.

Emergency Payments

There may be unexpected situations that arise that may leave you in a financial crisis or at risk of not being able to eat or heat your home.

In these times, a one-off emergency payment can be provided. We will talk to you about this option should the need arise.

Help with your rent

If you are over 18, living away from your family and are studying full-time in non-advanced education (up to and including A Level or equivalent), you can claim Housing Benefit.

You can enrol in your course of study at any time up to your 21st birthday and can continue to receive these benefits up to the end of your studies or the end of the academic year in which you become 21 years old, whichever is earlier.

This help is also available to you if you have stayed on with your former foster carers.

Housing Benefit can pay for all or part of your rent. If you are likely to have difficulty paying your full rent, you can approach the council and ask for Discretionary Housing Payments. These are not guaranteed, but the council may be able to help you for a period until you find other accommodation or earn enough to pay your rent yourself.

Help with your council tax

Council Tax is a payment made to your local authority for local services such as collecting your rubbish clearing streets, running services (including providing social workers) and the local parks.

In October 2018, Bexley Council made a decision to exempt all care leavers living in the Bexley area from payment of Council Tax up to the age of 25 years.*

This means that as a young adult leaving the Council's care, you will not have to pay Council Tax. This decision was made so that you have the best chance of success living independently. We hope that you will consider this as a signal that we want to support you and we want your future to be good!!

TV Licence

Everyone who watches TV, even if it is only via a catch-up service or online on your laptop has to have and pay for a licence. Payments can be divided up into weekly or monthly payments, and again, your PA will support you to apply. You are at risk of a fine or worse if you do not have a licence.

Setting up home allowance

It is an exciting time being able to choose your own furniture and how your home will look. We will provide you with a grant of £2000. This will not be given to you in one lump sum and will be spent with your Personal Adviser. The grant is not intended to meet the costs of personal support or accommodation costs. This payment is an important mark of your independence, so we will want you to spend it wisely and on things that will help you to make this important step towards independence.

Additional one off payments

In addition to any benefit or subsistence payments received, care leavers can also receive additional funding in the following circumstances:

- Housing costs – dependent on financial assessment and agreement by the Director or Deputy Director of Children's Services .
- Travel costs for attending a training course.

** If, unusually, you leave care and live away from Bexley, we will still exempt you from Council Tax payments. Your PA will need to work closely with the Council where you are living so that we can make payment direct to them, once all your discount applications have been made.*

- Fares to job and education interviews will be provided to young people not in education or training if they do not qualify for Oyster Card coverage.
- Travel warrant to support contact with your family if you or they live outside of Bexley
- Payment vouchers as follows:

18th birthday	£40
19, 20, 22, 23, 24 and 25	£15
21st birthday	£30
Christmas	£15

Helping you into education, employment or training.

As your corporate parent we have high ambitions for you and make it our priority to support you into a job that is good for you, an academic option such as a university course, an apprenticeship or a training course.

We will help you get the funding you need in order to do well. Your PA will support you with any practical stuff that you may need.

Young adults leaving care can also access financial support for their education outside of Leaving care services. Some of this support is specifically for Young adults leaving care; your PA will support you with this.

At Bexley, we believe that every single young adult can and should be able to work or study. Therefore your PA will stick by you when you are deciding what you wish to do – and will be there to give you a helping push when you are unsure!



It does not matter if you have a gap in your education so long as you start it again as soon as is reasonably possible

Leaving care services will help you to make applications that may financially support your education and training placements.

Financial support for young adults who have left our care and attend higher Education (university or at a college)

If you are a Young Adult leaving our care and attending Higher Education, you may be entitled to education equipment and living costs, ask your Personal Adviser for the current amounts. You are entitled to apply for student loans and grants. Usually you will not be able to claim benefits. Student loans and maintenance loans are administered by Student Finance. Both will need to be repaid when your earnings reach a certain amount when you have completed your course of further study. See student finance website for further information www.gov.uk/student-finance.

You may also be entitled to a Higher Education Bursary to meet the costs of your 'out of term' accommodation. Please visit the government funded website on supporting university finances for further information. www.gov.uk/extra-money-pay-university

Two organisations which are useful to know about are Buttle UK, which is a charity who award universities a 'quality mark' for offering additional support to Young adults leaving care, and Propel, which is run by the Become charity. Both organisations are easy to access and offer good advice. Their details – and details of other charities which offer bursaries and grants are at the end of this document.

There are many opportunities available which would look great on your CV too including:

- 1. Total Respect training – you will be trained to deliver sessions for children's professionals on the experience of being a looked after child. This activity has a voucher reward as it is delivered in a professional setting with the usual professional rules, turning up on time, wearing work style clothes. Young adults tell us that they enjoy these days.
- 2. Recruiting and interviewing new children's services professionals.
- 3. Meeting the elected members known as Councillors, to share your experience and help them to consider whether the services for children, young people and young adults are reaching the right people in the right way.
- 4. You could be involved in one of our focus groups. At different times throughout the year we may need to have a specific group to help us look at certain areas we would like to change or need advice on.
- 5. Ask your PA for the details for our participation officer or our young director for more information about how to get involved.

Holiday Accommodation – Where will I live?

If you are staying away from home to study at University, we will ensure you are able to return to accommodation during term breaks should you wish to do so.

If you are staying with your foster carer up to age 21, you will return to your home with them. If in semi-independent accommodation, this can also be provided for you in holiday time.

Apprenticeships

Bexley are committed to supporting you to access Apprenticeship opportunities throughout the council. Your Personal Adviser will discuss this with you in detail.

Help to understand your history.

Access to records

Children's Services have to keep written case records of your care history. These records must be kept for 75 years. You can request your records any time after you become 18 years old. You do not have to read through the information on your own. It can be upsetting or confusing to do this alone.

Your PA can support you or you can bring a friend.

We would strongly suggest that you do not do this on your own. You need to request to see your records in writing. Children's Services must then respond to you in writing giving the timescale. It must happen within 40 days. You may find that some of the information is not available for you to read. This is because some of the information in your records may identify other people known as third parties. Additionally, if there is information that may seriously harm your physical or mental health it may not be given to you.



Hobbies and Interests

As your corporate parents we will be there to offer you advice and support. A big part of staying mentally and physically healthy is enjoying hobbies and interests. At Bexley this includes access to free Gym membership and swimming.

We can make an agreement through your pathway plan about how we can support you to get involved in sporting activities or other leisure activities near where you live.

Your PA will have lots of details of clubs, community groups, and activities which may interest you, when you next speak with your PA ask for details.

If needed we can assist you to enrol on the electoral register.

We want to hear your views so we can improve the experience for other young adults leaving care.

You will be given the opportunity to get involved in Positive Journeys Seniors (Care Leavers Forum), training professionals, going on trips, participate in workshops and much more. Not only will this help boost your confidence but will also add to your CV.

We will keep you informed with all the exciting things going on in Bexley, including Supper Club (where you can come along and make healthy meals) and special events put on especially for you.

For more information contact natalie.eastwood@bexley.gov.uk 07815584494.

Your Feedback

Bexley has a care leaver's forum known as Positive Journeys Seniors, which meets fortnightly on a Tuesday. There are also extra sessions for specific areas such as cookery club. You are welcome to attend and we would encourage you to do so. We will also ask your PA to make sure to help you to join and attend the Forum.

What will happen if I make decisions that are not good for me or make me unsafe? e.g. running away or not making contact

If you are unexpectedly missing and are no longer contactable even via a friend or family member, this will raise concerns about your personal safety we will be very worried. We will report you as missing to the police if we are unable to contact you for longer than a week.

You are an adult but as any good parent would, we still worry about you. We accept that you are able to take responsibility for your own

life and where you wish to go or whether you continue to speak or meet with the leaving care service. If you have explicitly stated that you do not wish to receive a service from the leaving care team and have stopped means of contact or communication, you would not automatically be assumed as missing. We will carefully consider all the information we have and explore what the contributing factors are that may have led to you going missing to plan what to do next. We really hope that we are helping you as a young adult, and therefore want to stay in regular contact.

Returning Later for Support

You can return at any time if you have not been in contact for a while up to the age of 25 years old to receive help again. When you contact us, the leaving care team manager will arrange for a Personal Adviser to speak to you within one working day of you contacting us. The Personal Adviser will want to understand what has happened in your life since we last saw you, what you would like to see for your future, and what support the leaving care service can provide to you. Once agreed, the support offer will be incorporated into your updated pathway plan and reviewed regularly.

And finally, if you find yourself in trouble with the police, or any authority, we want to help you.

We do not automatically assume that you are going to get into trouble which is why we have left this message to the end.

We want you to have a happy and content life, but we all know that life is sometimes a rollercoaster with its ups and downs. We will not judge you, we know that young people make mistakes. We will try our very best to help you to make changes in your life so that you make the right decisions about your future. Thank you for reading this guide. Thank you for trusting that we will do our best to help and support you. Most of all, thank you for letting us be involved in your life and able to have a relationship with you. That makes you special.

What are we
REALLY concerned
about?



List of Available Services and Supports for Young Adults Leaving Care

Agency & Contact	Type of Support	Description
<p>UCAS</p> <p>www.ucas.com/ucas</p>	Education & training	Provides a list of post-16 higher education university providers and the application process. Visit their special section of their website dedicated to supporting care leavers.
<p>Bexley College</p> <p>https://www.lsec.ac.uk/</p> <p>Sandra Hopperton</p> <p>sandra.hopperton@bexley.ac.uk</p>	Employment & training	Offers a wide range of vocational and higher education courses. Support for those with special learning needs is also available.
<p>The Learning & Enterprise College</p> <p>www.thelearningcentrebxley.ac.uk</p> <p>Lesley Clarke</p> <p>lesleyclarke@tlc.ac.uk</p>	Education, employment & training	Offers a wide range of vocational, training, higher education, and apprenticeship opportunities.
<p>NNECL</p> <p>www.nnecl.org</p>	Education & training	The national network for the education of care leavers has lots of information and guidance on college and university opportunities and funding sources for care leavers.
<p>Skills for Growth</p> <p>www.skillsforgrowth.org.uk</p>	Training & employment	Providing information and opportunities for employment and apprenticeships.
<p>ICON Training</p> <p>www.icon-training.com</p>	Training & employment	Providing information and opportunities for employment and apprenticeships.

Agency & Contact	Type of Support	Description
<p>Propel</p> <p>www.propel.org.uk</p>	<p>Education & training</p>	<p>Providing information and search engine to find college and university courses from providers that help support care leavers. This is run by the Become charity.</p>
<p>Become</p> <p>www.becomecharity.org.uk</p> <p>Tel: 0800 023 2033</p>	<p>Advocacy, rights and responsibilities, coaching</p>	<p>Charity providing looked after children and care leavers with advice, information, and support on their rights and responsibilities. Offers a free advice line, coaching programme, and the Propel programme.</p>
<p>Bexley Council Apprenticeships</p>	<p>Training & employment</p>	<p>Bexley council offers a wide range of apprenticeship opportunities. For details visit the main council webpage and look for apprenticeships.</p>
<p>Job Centre Plus</p> <p>www.gov.uk/jobsearch</p>	<p>Training & employment</p>	<p>Personal Advisers and care leavers can search for jobs and apprenticeships advertised with Job Centre's across the UK.</p>
<p>Care Leavers Association</p> <p>www.careleavers.com</p>	<p>Support network, identity, & independence skills</p>	<p>A national charity to help advocate and campaign for the rights of care leavers. Provides advice, support, and networking opportunities for care leavers to connect with other care leavers.</p>
<p>NHS Choices</p> <p>www.nhs.uk</p>	<p>Health, emotional, & behavioural</p>	<p>Provides health information and advice, including a search engine to find any local health service across the UK.</p>
<p>Asylum Support</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/asylum-support</p>	<p>Immigration & settlement</p>	<p>Information provided by the government on asylum applications, process, and appeals.</p>
<p>Migrant Children's Project</p> <p>www.childrenslegalcentre.com</p> <p>Tel: 0207 636 8505</p>	<p>Immigration & settlement</p>	<p>A free service by Coram Legal providing information, legal advice and representation around immigration and settlement issues.</p>

Agency & Contact	Type of Support	Description
Oxleas NHS Transitions Team Tel: 0208 303 7777 www.oxleas.nhs.uk	Health, emotional, & behavioural	Adult mental health and learning disability support service providing support with health and educational needs.
Bexley Locality Mental Health Service screeners@bexley.gov.uk Tel: 020 36689 490	Health, emotional, & behavioural	Bexley adult community mental health service providing assessment, diagnosis, and treatment.
Prospects www.prospects.co.uk Tel: 0203 045 5555	Training & employment, NEET	Prospects provide support workers and drop in services to care leavers to age 25 years old. They can help with employment, education, training, and personal issues.
Drive Forward Tel: 0207 620 3000	Health, emotional, & behavioural	Support with employment and training specific to care leavers.
Bexley Crisis Resolution Service Tel: 020 8836 6649 / 6724	Health, emotional & behavioural	Provides services to adults experiencing an acute mental health crisis.
Family Nursing Partnership Bexley: oxl-tr.bromleycat@nhs.net National: enquiries@fnp.nhs.uk	Health, family relationships, community and support network	Providing pre-natal and parenting advice and support to young mums and dads aged 19 and under.
Bexley Safeguarding Adults Team safeguardingadults@bexley.gov.uk Tel: 020 8303 7777	Personal safety	Where there are concerns about a disabled or vulnerable care leaver who may have been abused or neglected by a person or agency providing care and support to them.
Unite Foundation www.unitefoundation.co.uk	Housing, education	A charitable organisation that helps fund accommodation and utility bill expenses for care leavers pursuing higher education studies in university for up to three years.

Agency & Contact	Type of Support	Description
<p>Coram Voice</p> <p>www.coramvoice.org.uk</p> <p>Tel: 0808 800 5792</p>	<p>Advocacy, rights and responsibilities</p>	<p>National information and advocacy services to young people and care leavers aged 16-25 years old on what their rights and responsibilities are. They have advocates who specialise in young people and care leavers who have a mental health condition or disability.</p>
<p>NYAS</p> <p>www.nyas.net</p> <p>Tel: 0808 8081001</p>	<p>Advocacy, rights and responsibilities</p>	<p>The National Youth Advisery Service provides advocacy support, legal representation and a helpline to young people and care leavers.</p>
<p>Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP)</p> <p>www.ceop.police.uk</p>	<p>Personal safety</p>	<p>Provides a lot of helpful advice and information for young people, adults, and professionals on the risks and how to protect yourself from online abuse and exploitation.</p>



I. BEING LOOKED AFTER WILL BE 'GOOD FOR ME'
<p>i) only in their best interests</p> <p>'the right children become looked after, good long terms plans are made for them and the length of time they remain in our care is safely reduced'</p>
<p>ii) respecting families and working closely with them</p> <p>'keeping parents and family members involved in decisions where it is safe to do so, making sure families and carers understand plans for the future, enabling children to have contact with their families when they want and need to and supporting families to change'</p>
<p>iii) building a 'safe network' around children we look after</p> <p>'managers, social workers, independent reviewing officers, carers and keyworkers spend time planning and thinking together about how to help the children we look after and keep them safe, including making strong responses and plans to protect them if they become unsafe or are at risk of being so'</p>
2. SAFE AND CARING RELATIONSHIPS ARE 'GOOD FOR ME'
<p>iv) permanent choices that last</p> <p>'making permanent and secure plans with looked after children and care leavers about their futures. The plans are understood by them, their families and carers and we work to prioritise stability where looked after children and care leavers are living'</p>
<p>v) listening well, learning from feedback and doing something in response</p> <p>'on every meeting with looked after children and care leavers, listen to their experiences, wishes and feelings. Take into full account what they are saying and make clear responses that they can understand'</p>
<p>vi) strong relationships that help recovery</p> <p>'our work and the work of carers and keyworkers with looked after children and care leavers, helps them to understand and recover from the harm they have suffered'</p>
3. EDUCATION, HEALTH AND SAFE BEHAVIOURS ARE 'GOOD FOR ME'
<p>vii) health matters</p> <p>'looked after children and care leavers physical, emotional and psychological health is prioritised by social workers, keyworkers and carers'</p>
<p>viii) education, employment, training and learning matter</p> <p>'looked after children and care leavers schooling, learning and skills are prioritised by social workers, keyworkers, carers and the virtual school'</p>
<p>ix) If I have a special educational need or disability</p> <p>'looked after children and care leavers who have special needs and/or disabilities, understand the help they will receive, the plans for their futures and their progress is closely and regularly assessed'</p>
<p>x) running away and being a missing person</p> <p>'looked after children and care leavers who run away or who go missing are considered by managers, social workers, carers and keyworkers as being at risk of harm or significant harm. The action we take will recognise this degree of risk at all times'</p>
<p>xi) crime, violence and gangs</p> <p>'looked after children and care leavers who are at risk of or who are involved in crime, violence or are associated with or are gang members, benefit from effective support from youth offending colleagues and good partnerships with the police and local justice system'</p>

4. BECOMING A SUCCESSFUL, INDEPENDENT, SECURE AND SAFE ADULT IS 'GOOD FOR ME'

xii) leaving care and living independently

'young people leaving our care as adults are given the early support they need to continue to be independent and to sustain independence, choice and control of their lives. This includes 'staying put' if that is in their best interests'

xiii) housing, financial stability and things to do

'our care leavers will have access to high quality accommodation that any good parent would expect for their child/ren. We will make sure they do not become homeless and they will have also have access to resources to support their hobbies and interests'

xiv) staying safe from harm

'our care leavers will be protected from the further harm and abuse caused by criminal and sexual exploitation, drugs, trafficking and being targeted by organised 'county lines'.

5. SOCIAL WORKERS WHO MAKE A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE ARE 'GOOD FOR ME'

xv) how well we do things and the difference we make

'the quality of our professional practice with looked after children and care leavers will be exceptional, being characterised by relationships that make a positive and enduring difference for them and sustain over time'

Top tips to help keep you safe online

- Protect your online reputation: use the services provided to manage your digital footprints and 'think before you post.' Your information posted online can last forever and could be shared publicly by anyone. Employers many years down the line will look for you online!
- Know where to find help: understand how to report to service providers and use blocking and deleting tools. If something happens that upsets you online, it's never too late to tell someone. It is not embarrassing, or your fault.
- Don't give in to pressure: if you lose your inhibitions you've lost control; once you've pressed send you can't take it back.



Contact Details

Duty Personal Adviser
020 3045 5048

Team Managers

Carl Coffey
020 3045 3898
Carl.Coffey@bexley.gov.uk

Chidinma Uwakaneme
020 3045 3308
Chidinma.Uwakaneme@bexley.gov.uk

Service Managers

Edrich Alexander (Interim)
020 3045 5374
Edrich.Alexander@bexley.gov.uk

Carlos Galaz
020 3045 5320
Carlos.Galaz@bexley.gov.uk

Head of Service

Jo Cross
020 3045 5126
Jo.Cross@bexley.gov.uk

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