



Our Offer to Care Leavers 2019 - 2020

1. Introduction

As your corporate parent, Brent Council continues to be responsible for you after you turn 18. We must make sure that you are safe, healthy and are achieving your goals. As any good parent, we want to make sure you have the best possible support to help you thrive as you grow older.

We will do our best to help you achieve your full potential. We know that it is a big step when you move out of care and start living on your own. Being a good parent means keeping in touch and providing you with the support you need to meet your individual needs.

Just because you are leaving care, or have already left care, we haven't stopped caring about you. We want to make sure that you feel safe and supported and know where and who to go for advice and help.

This local offer is made by Brent Council to all care leavers and sets out how we will support you.

To be able to get the support set out in this offer, you must have been in care for at least 13 weeks between the ages of 14 and 16 (including your 16th birthday) or for 13 weeks after your 16th birthday. Your personal advisor will talk with you about the information in this offer.

2. Support we must provide by law

Following changes introduced through the Children and Social Work Act 2017, you can ask for support from your personal advisor until you reach the age of 25. This is to make sure care leavers receive similar support that young adults who live with their families would normally expect.

- **Personal Advisor**

Once you turn 18, in most cases, you'll no longer have a social worker, so your personal advisor, we call them PAs, will make sure you get the services you need and help co-ordinate your pathway plan and reviews.

Your PA is there to help you to think about your future, what you are studying, what you want to do in the future and your independence skills. Your PA will talk to you and other people who are important to you to find out more about you and your needs.

Your PA can help you with lots of things in your life. The main things they will do are:

- Be involved in understanding your needs and preparing your Pathway Plan so that you can get a good idea of what you want to do with your life;

- Review your Pathway Plan at least every six months to help you to stay on track and achieve the things you want from life;
- With your agreement, seek the views of our partner agencies when completing your pathway plan. This may include housing, education, training and employment providers, benefits and health services. PAs will also liaise with youth offending services and probation if needed.
- Even if your case has been closed you can still get in touch with us before your 25th birthday and we will assess what help or assistance we may be able to give you.

2. Support we offer

• Education, Employment and Training

Good parents want to help their children achieve the right qualifications, training and skills to enable them to succeed in life. As your corporate parent, we want to make sure you have this solid foundation so that you are able to find the right career and job that goes with it. To do this we will make sure you have good advice, support and assistance.

The law says that we provide you with assistance with expenses linked with employment, education and training, if you cannot excess assistance from any other agency. In particular:

- We will provide you with a Higher Education (HE) bursary of £2,000 if you go to University, to help with books and materials. The payment will be paid in instalments over the duration of your course.
- We will provide somewhere for you to stay during your summer University holiday (or funding if you would prefer to make your own arrangements) if you are in higher education or in residential further education. We will only pay your rent if you cannot claim housing benefit or universal credit. During the Christmas and Easter term time your maintenance and student loan should cover your rent. If you think this will cause you financial hardship, please contact your personal advisor who might be able to help.

Our other education and training support offer to you includes:

- Support to meet your transport costs when travelling to training, school/college, apprenticeships or job interviews if not available from elsewhere i.e. DWP or College;
- Support to buy tools, equipment, essential clothing and books, if you cannot get them from your local college or through the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).
- Support & advice if you choose to go to university, such as helping you apply for tuition fees and maintenance loans;
- In partnership with Brent Works we will send your personal advisor employment, training and apprenticeship opportunities to help you get into employment, training or an apprenticeship scheme within the Council or elsewhere;
- A Department of Work and Pensions worker seconded to the leaving care team who will assist you in claiming benefits and avoid you getting undue benefit sanctions;
- An annual celebration event to share the positive education and training experiences of care leavers;
- Up to 10 apprenticeships arranged by the council on an annual basis;
- A traineeship programme offered twice a year in partnership with Brent Employment Skills & Enterprise for all care leavers who do not have the required qualification and skills to apply for an apprenticeship scheme;
- Volunteering opportunities for care leavers.

- **Accommodation**

Your PA will help you to find suitable accommodation. We will work with you to ensure you are provided with the most suitable housing options. Our accommodation support offer to you includes:

The law says the following about how we must support you with your accommodation:

- We will encourage you to stay in care until you are 18, but if you choose to leave care before the age of 18 we must provide you with suitable accommodation.

Our other accommodation support offer to you includes:

- Supported accommodation if you are not ready or don't want to have your own tenancy yet;
- Supporting you to remain with your foster carers under what's called a 'Staying Put' arrangement. This will be reviewed every six months to make sure its meeting your needs;
- Once you have reached the stage where you can live independently and maintain your tenancy, you will have the option to apply to Brent Council for social housing (this is accommodation managed by us or a housing association). As a care leaver you will be given priority. Your PA will speak to the nominated housing officer, who works with the leaving care team, when you are ready to live on your own;
- Access to a nominated tenancy officer who can assist you with your tenancy;
- Workshops to receive advice about holding down a tenancy, including avoiding rent arrears, paying bills and budgeting effectively;
- A 'Setting up Home Allowance' of £2,000 (based on assessed need) for items you need to set up home like appliances, bedding and furniture.
- If you don't want to live in Brent because you have friends, family or connections elsewhere you will need to talk to your PA. Your PA can make contact with the Local Authority where you wish to live to see if they are able to assist you.
- A decorating allowance if housed in a Brent Housing property, such as to buy paint or wallpaper;
- To give you advice to prevent you from becoming intentionally homeless in Brent and being given a second chance if you run into problems with your tenancy.

- **Your Health & Wellbeing**

Looking after your physical health and mental wellbeing is extremely important as you get older. The Leaving Care Team and your PA will arrange advice and support for you to encourage you to lead a healthy and active lifestyle. Our health and wellbeing offer to you includes:

- Providing you with a health passport at your last statutory health check before turning 18;
- Support to register with a GP;
- Providing information on healthy living including 'Staying Healthy' sessions;
- Use of the Tricycle Theatre: care leavers will have free tickets to events;
- If you need someone to talk to your PA or keyworker can refer you to counselling including offering 'talking therapies' or for general advice to The Mix (Freephone 0808 808 4994);

- A Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service consultation before turning 18 for social workers and PAs so that they can be better equipped to assist you in relation to your health and well-being;
- If you are a young parent, being referred to a local children's centre for help;
- We will, depending on assessment of need, provide assistance towards certain medical costs if they are not covered by the NHS. This particularly applies to young people with no recourse to public funds.
- All young people in custody are provided with resettlement and aftercare support.

- **Finances**

We will provide you with support to become financially independent, in a similar way to how other parents support their own children.

The law and the guidance says:

- We can, depending on assessment of need, provide financial assistance towards expenses relating to education, employment or training and also access to other sources of funding such as college or university funds or from the Department of Works and Pensions.

Our additional support offer to you includes:

- Being exempt from paying Council Tax, only after you have maximised the council tax rebate because you are on a low income or receiving universal credit;
- Providing you with relevant money management courses;
- Information on how to access your Junior ISA, if you have one (a fund of money set aside by the government and the council);
- Support to open a bank account;
- Support to gain important identification documents, such as a passport National Insurance number and/or provisional driving licence, before your 18th birthday;
- Financial support in exceptional emergencies.

- **Relationships**

As well as support from a Personal Advisor, we will offer you additional practical support, such as:

- Signpost you to advocacy service if you need one;
- Where appropriate, continuing support contact with an 'independent visitor'
- Help to maintain or regain contact with people special to you or who cared for you in the past, like former foster carers or social workers;
- Life skills workshops that will focus on practical skills and managing relationships;
- Group work for young parents regarding healthy relationships;
- Group work with former Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children regarding relationships to minimise risks of isolation;
- Workshops for care leavers with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities by Brent Outreach Autism Team regarding relationships;
- As part of our independence training, workshops on Healthy Relationships.

- **Participation in Society**

We want our care leavers to be active members of society, and to have all the chances in life that other young adults have. We can help you participate in society in the following ways:

- Workshops to inform you more about participation in society and having your voice heard, led by the Chief Executive of the council.
- Encouraging and helping you to enrol on the Electoral Register, so you can vote in elections;
- Providing information on groups and clubs you may wish to join;
- Development of a website for care leavers and an app to support independent living arrangements;
- Seats on Brent Youth Parliament;
- Informing you about voluntary work that you may be interested in;
- Giving you advice and helping you to challenge any discrimination you face as a care leaver;
- You will have access to our Children and Young People's participation service called Care Leavers in Action (CLIA), where you can get involved in decision making on matters that have impact on children in care and care leavers or join an interview panel when recruiting senior staff and commissioned services to the council.
- Monthly Hub events which are organised by care leavers and personal advisors
- Weekly football practice for all care leavers in Brent.

3. Who can help?

As a care leaver, there is a range of support services available to you. We have put together a list of useful contact details. If there is anything you do not understand or need further information about then please speak to your PA.

Brent Leaving Care Team

Where to find the Leaving Care Team: Civic Centre, Engineers Way, Wembley.

When are we open: Monday to Friday 9 a.m. – 5.00 p.m.

How to contact us: Duty Number 0208 379 4612 or 4613 during office hours, 24-hour emergency number 0208 863 5250

Independent Advocacy: You have a right to support from an independent advocate if you are thinking about challenging decisions about the care we give you. An advocate is someone who is independent of the council who can inform you of your rights and help you to be heard in meetings. For advocacy, we use an independent agency called Aidhour that provides advocacy services for looked after children and care leavers. To find out more you can contact the manager of this service, Goitom Mebrahtu, Goitom.Mebrahtu@brent.gov.uk

Participation Service (Care Leavers in Action) – email: Francesca.Carr@brent.gov.uk
or Phone: 020 8937 3695

Brent Care Leavers Charter

Other places you can go for help:

- Rees: The Care Leavers Foundation <https://www.reesfoundation.org> Provides small grants for care leavers aged 18-25;

- The care leavers association <http://www.careleavers.com> A charity aimed at improving the lives of care leavers;
- Become <http://www.becomecharity.org.uk> Online advice and information for care leavers;
- Propel <http://propel.org.uk/UK> Information on what support is available for care leavers at university;
- Shelter <https://england.shelter.org.uk> Provides housing advice;
- National government benefits calculator <https://www.gov.uk/benefits-calculators> Information on benefits;
- Citizens Advice Bureau <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk> Information about money, benefits, your rights, employment, housing and the law.