

THE **PACK**

A guide for leaving care

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INTRODUCTION

This offer has been designed with the help of the Portsmouth Children in Care Council to help you prepare for leaving care when you turn 18.

Just because you are leaving care, or have already left care, we haven't stopped caring about you!

To get the support laid 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. If that is the case, this offer is for you.

This booklet is available online at portsmouth.gov.uk/the-pack

Your Personal Adviser (PA) will talk to you about the information in this leaflet as part of your pathway planning.

PA support will be offered to all care leavers up to the age of 25. You can contact us at any point between the age of 21 and 25 to ask for PA support.

We will try to ensure you keep the same PA, though this may not always be possible. The amount of support you receive from your PA will depend on your needs and circumstances.

You may need extra support because you:

- ▶ have a disability or special education needs
- ▶ are in or leaving custody
- ▶ are a young parent
- ▶ are an unaccompanied minor and your immigration status is not clear
- ▶ are going through a difficult time in your life.

You have a right to:

- ▶ be involved in all decisions about your plans for leaving care
- ▶ support from an independent advocate if you are not happy with the care we give you
- ▶ see the information we keep about you, including the files and records written about you whilst in care.

CHILDREN IN CARE COUNCIL

The Children in Care Council (CiCC) is made up of young people who are all cared for by Portsmouth City Council. It gives children and young people the chance to shape and influence the support and services they receive at every level.

Things our CiCC do:

- ▶ Hold regular group meetings to decide what areas of the service they'd like to develop
- ▶ Attend decision-making meetings to ensure that views of children and young people are included in those decisions
- ▶ Regularly meet with senior management to share their experiences
- ▶ Sit on interview panels for new members of staff in Portsmouth
- ▶ Deliver and support training for social workers
- ▶ Work with the fostering service to recruit more foster carers
- ▶ Set up and run activities and events for other looked after children and care leavers



MENTORING

WHAT IS MENTORING?

Mentoring is when one person engages in building a healthy, trusting relationship with another person who wishes to help them. Mentors provide support, guidance, friendship, role modelling, assistance and a listening ear.

If you feel you would benefit from a mentor, we will try to provide one for you. We have a number of people in the council who are keen to support you, particularly around work-related issues.

Benefits of mentoring:

- ▶ Opportunity to form a positive mutual relationship
- ▶ Helps build self-esteem and self-confidence
- ▶ Gives the mentor the chance to pass on valuable experience and knowledge
- ▶ Helps the mentee to develop personal, social and professional skills

FLYING SOLO

Flying Solo is a charity set up to raise money to help care leavers build networks and help each other through the difficulties and challenges they might face.

Flying Solo was founded by Joe Weltch, a young person with a number of years' experience as a looked after child and care leaver. Flying Solo has a Board of Trustees that decide how to spend the money raised. This board has promised that at least 50% of the members will always be Portsmouth Care Leavers.

ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKER AND PERSONAL ADVISER

SOCIAL WORKERS

You will be supported by a social worker in the through care team until you turn 18. Your social worker is here to help you to develop your independent living skills and also to act as your corporate parent. Your social worker will work with you and the people who are important to you to ensure that you achieve the goals you set together. These will be set out in your Pathway Plan. Your social worker is responsible for ensuring that you receive appropriate care, education and health services.

Your social worker will visit you in your accommodation at least once every six weeks, or three months if you have been living in your accommodation for over a year and there are no concerns about this accommodation. This will be the case until you turn 18 and there will be a period of handover to your personal adviser (PA) who will then support you until you are 21, or on until you are 25 if you wish.

Your social worker will work hard to meet your wishes and feelings, but sometimes they won't be able to give you everything you want, particularly if they are concerned about your safety. They are there to support you in taking control of your own future.

PERSONAL ADVISORS

A PA is an experienced support worker who is not a social worker. PAs have a range of different backgrounds and qualifications. They are there to offer you support, advice, guidance and assistance in developing your independence. Having diverse backgrounds means that we try to ensure that we match you to a PA who can best meet your support needs.

Your PA will be introduced to you before you leave care. When you are 18 and a care leaver, you will be supported by your PA. You should see your PA face to face a minimum of once every three months, but we aim to have more regular contact, in agreement with you. If you have an emergency and your PA is not available you can speak to a duty worker. You can agree how often and when to be in contact with your PA. Once you reach 21, you can decide if you'd like to remain supported by your PA up until 25.

Your PA can help you to access other support services that you might need. This may include mental health support, debt planning and budgeting, housing and accommodation, benefits and education. PAs may not be able to provide this support to you directly, but they will help you to find someone who can. PAs can support you with simple budgeting, however, they may refer for more specialised input if you are in debt and this is complex. You will need to share information that will help us to help you, for example, if you are in debt and want our help, your PA will need to see details of your income and expenditure or it may restrict any support we may be able to offer.

Just like social workers, PAs will update your Pathway Plan with you.

WHAT IS A PATHWAY PLAN?

It's important to remember that the Pathway Plan is your plan.

You should be a part of the process of writing it and should always receive a copy of your plan and be encouraged to sign it. It should be written in language that you understand and you can ask for changes to be made to your plan if you don't understand it. It will be available through My Link account.

The Pathway Plan should identify support needs and agree actions to be taken to meet those needs. Some of these actions will be for you to complete and some will be for your social worker, PA, carer or family members. Your PA is there to advise you when you have major decisions to make and will help you think through the pros and cons of any choices you may wish to make, but the decisions will be up to you as an adult.

The Pathway Plan should outline your rights and entitlements as a young person in care/leaving care. You might find it a long document, but that is because it needs to cover certain topics including: a short explanation of why you entered care, who you are and your identity, who has your important documents and a little about your family and friends. It also needs to cover how your needs will be met in relation to education, employment and training, health, managing and living independently and where you live and will live in the future. It should also include support with budgeting and your financial entitlements and agreed actions to be taken.

Pathway plans should always have your input. However, if you are not working with us, we will have to complete this on your behalf because it is a legal duty for us to ensure you have a Pathway Plan.

Your Pathway Plan needs to be reviewed every six months and a manager from the Leaving Care Team will read and agree to the plan.

SUPPORT TO UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU ARRIVE IN THE UK TO SEEK ASYLUM?

Once you meet the social worker from the Through Care Team they will take you to a supported placement. This may be with a family, who will support you. You will also be supported to see a doctor, dentist and optician to ensure you are healthy, or that any health needs are met.

If you don't have one already, you will also be supported to meet with a solicitor who can help you with your asylum claim. You can ask your social worker to help you choose a solicitor and once you start your claim with them you cannot change to a new solicitor. Your legal fees will be covered by legal aid for your initial claim and for an appeal provided your solicitor feels you have grounds for this, so you don't have to pay anything for these appointments.

ASSESSMENT

Age assessment

You will undergo an Age Assessment if you cannot provide documents which confirm your date of birth and there are some significant questions about your age. This process will be managed sensitively. You are entitled to breaks during this meeting. The Age Assessment will explore a number of issues, some of which may be hard to talk about, but it's important to ask these questions so that the social worker can understand how to best support you in the present and future. The social worker will ask that you try your best to answer as openly and honestly as you can.

For the Age Assessment you will have an interpreter who can speak your language and translate all of the questions and answers. There will be two social workers, who you will not have met before, and an Appropriate Adult, who is there as an independent adult to make sure that you are being treated fairly and that you are OK in the meeting. The outcome of the Age Assessment will be shared with

you at the end of a second meeting. If it is decided that you are a child, you will remain supported by the Through Care Team and can stay in the accommodation you are currently in.

If it is decided that you are an adult, your needs will still be met, but you will be referred to NASS (gov.uk/asylum-support) and you will need to move. If you are unhappy with this decision, you have a right to appeal and your solicitor can help you with this.

The social worker will provide you with a written outcome of your Age Assessment. They will also provide this to the Home Office. The document that is sent to the Home Office will not share details of your journey or reason for seeking asylum, it will simply share the process of the Age Assessment and the decision about your age.

We will make sure that you can meet with your Appropriate Adult and interpreter before the meeting.

The Age Assessment should be completed within 28 working days wherever possible.

Needs Assessment

When there is no question about your age you will still have a formal meeting with your social worker, who will ask you questions in order to understand how they can best support you. The information gained here will not be used to determine your asylum claim. It is simply so the social worker can get to know you and help you. You will have an interpreter for this meeting.

You will meet with your solicitor before you are called to your Home Office interview. Your solicitor will talk to you about your claim and put together a statement of evidence for your claim which will be discussed at your Home Office interview.

HOME OFFICE INITIAL INTERVIEW

You should be provided with an appointment for your initial interview with the Home Office soon after arriving in the UK. However the timings can vary on this. You will be appointed a caseworker from the Home Office who will complete the interview and advise you of what to do next. Your PA, social worker or keyworker will support you at the meeting. At this interview you should have an interpreter who will be provided by the Home Office. Your legal representative can also be there with you.

During this meeting the Home Office representative will ask you detailed questions about your reason for seeking asylum in the UK and your journey to get here. This meeting may be very difficult for you as you will have to talk about your past in detail. If you need support after this meeting you should ask your social worker who can arrange for you to speak to someone.

During this meeting you will be asked to explain why you are afraid to return to your home country.

You can also provide any documents to support your claim. You can speak to your legal representative about what kind of evidence could support your claim.

DECISION ON YOUR ASYLUM CLAIM

You should receive a decision about your asylum claim within 6 months of your interview. However, this may take much longer if your claim is complicated and the Home Office need to verify your explanation. It may also take longer if you are involved in any criminal investigations or proceedings in the UK or your home country. If you have been involved in any criminal activity in the UK it can affect your claim. If your decision is taking longer than expected you can speak to your social worker or PA in the Through Care Team or your legal representative who can speak to the Home Office about the delay. We understand this waiting time can be stressful, so it's important that you speak to your worker about your concerns and focus on engaging in positive activities.

If you are granted asylum you will generally receive 5 years Leave to Remain, after 5 years you can apply to settle in the UK.

If you are not granted asylum, you will receive a letter from the Home Office which will explain your options and what support you may receive. You will be asked to leave the UK which you can do voluntarily and with support, or forcibly. You will need to speak to your solicitor to see if you have a right to appeal this decision. If you decide to return home voluntarily, your air fare will be paid and you will receive a resettlement grant to help to re-establish yourself in your country of origin.

You may be asked to sign on at the Home Office at regular intervals during this time and may be liable to be detained. It's important that you comply with these instructions from the Home Office, even if you are worried about this.

While you are waiting for your initial decision or the result of an appeal, you cannot work. You are entitled to study at college and the Through Care Team will encourage you to do so. We will support you with your educational, housing and basic needs. It's important that if someone offers you work during this time you don't accept this. This is illegal and could lead to you working in inappropriate and unsafe conditions and you being in breach of the conditions on which you are able to stay in the UK.

APPEALING A DECISION FROM THE HOME OFFICE

If you are not granted asylum after the initial interview it is your right to discuss this with your legal representative to see if you have grounds to appeal that decision. Your social worker or PA can also help you with this. Sometimes you may have additional evidence to submit which may help your claim.

If you are granted an appeal, it will be heard before a 'tribunal' which is an independent body overseen by a judge. The judge will listen to the Home Office's reasons for denying your claim and your reasons for seeking asylum and will make a decision based on this. This may be a frightening process so please ask your social worker, PA or legal representative for support and advice. Your social worker or PA can attend the tribunal with you for support if you wish. Once your appeal has been heard you will again have to wait for an outcome.

APPEAL RIGHTS EXHAUSTED

If you have been through the appeal process and the Home Office still make a decision that you will not be granted Leave to Remain in the UK then you will be told you need to return to your home country. There may be reasons why you can't go right away, such as needing a travel document, or issues with the route to your home country. In this situation an assessment will be made about how we can best support you during this time and for how long. You will be expected to comply with the Home Office if they are asking you to work toward your return home.

Your rights

- ▶ It is your right to feel safe, supported and be treated with dignity in the UK. If you feel unsafe or uncertain you can speak to your social worker or PA about your concerns.
- ▶ You have a right to have an interpreter for meetings with the Home Office, doctor, dentist, social worker or solicitor if you need one.
- ▶ You have the right to access support and entitlements under the Children Act and Leaving Care Act.
- ▶ You have a right to access education and positive activities.
- ▶ It's important that you have relevant information about your asylum claim.
- ▶ You have the right to a Pathway Plan.

SUPPORT

There is a lot of support available to young people seeking asylum. If you wish to access any support you should speak to your carer, social worker or PA. You can also speak to any of the following organisations to get involved in positive activities or be supported.

MONEY

You will need an income wherever you live to pay for your rent, food, clothes, bills and things that you enjoy doing. Your income will come from one of the following:

- ▶ wages
- ▶ training allowance
- ▶ student grants or bursaries
- ▶ welfare benefits
- ▶ Portsmouth City Council.

When you start paid work, you will not usually be paid until the end of the first month after you start your job. We will pay your Personal Allowance and Housing Payments for the first month of your employment.

We will provide you with a **Leaving Care Grant of £2,000**: This is intended to help you make the move into independent living as a young adult. For most people it will be used to purchase household essentials for your first home. For other young people it could be used to help maintain employment or training so that they can maintain their accommodation. We will not provide you with cash.

You can also get a **16-19 bursary** of £1,200 each academic year from your College, provided you are attending regularly.

If you go into **higher education you are entitled to a £2,000 bursary** which is paid in instalments over the duration of your course. We will help with costs of vacation accommodation, or will provide it for you.

We will fund transport to and from college.

Care Leavers are eligible to claim benefits such as Income Support and Job Seekers Allowance in the same way as other young people. If you can show us that you have made a claim for these benefits we will support you with a three-week Personal Allowance whilst these are set up. This payment is the equivalent to the current benefit rate.



From September 2018, Universal Credit is being introduced in Portsmouth for new claimants. With the new benefit we will pay a two-week personal allowance and you will be able to request an advance payment online of up to 100% of your first payment, which you can repay over 12 months.

Every Care Leaver who retains active involvement with us will receive a **birthday allowance of £50 and a celebration allowance of £50 each year** until their 25th birthday.

If you go into higher education your PA will work with you via your Pathway Plan to assess what you will need and what you can receive from grants/student loans in order to put together a package of support. This package will be detailed in a letter to you. **If you wish to go on to Doctoral level study** we will expect you to self-fund by utilising paid studentships, employment and government loans. Your PA will be able to assist you in identifying funding streams you could apply for.

PROVISIONAL DRIVING LICENCE

We will ensure you have a provisional driving licence and pay for your theory test and revision book. However, cars can be expensive to run because of the cost of insurance, maintenance, tax and petrol. There are other much cheaper alternatives. We are working on a scheme to support our green city and exploring providing bicycles for our care leavers who are living and working within the city.

JOB SEEKING

We will:

- ▶ Purchase a suit for job interviews before you leave care
- ▶ Pay for transport to/from interviews and overnight accommodation if out of the city
- ▶ Pay for development fees/courses and support you with any necessary equipment to get your first job, e.g. construction skills certification scheme (CSCS) card
- ▶ We will support you with any uniform/clothing that you need for your first job

For those of you over 21 and not in education or training, your PA will offer advice and help you maximise your benefits, but will only offer financial support in exceptional circumstances.

There are organisations that can provide grants for care leavers up to 25 where you might have run out of other options. They generally give grants towards training and household items. You will find links to these on the app.

COUNCIL TAX

Your PA can also explore whether you might be eligible for Council Tax exemption.

Once you are 18 and living independently you have to pay Council Tax. If you are on a low income or benefits you get Council Tax Support to help you pay some of the cost. You also get a 25% reduction in your Council Tax if you live on your own. You claim Council Tax Support using the same form as for Housing Benefit. You can contact the Civic Offices for help with the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support form.

As a care leaver you are entitled to:

- ▶ Immediate access to advice and support if you are getting into financial difficulties because of the tax, or indeed for other reasons. You can rely on always being able to access swift, friendly, non-judgemental, practical advice, to help you manage all the different demands on you as an adult including council tax.
- ▶ The help could include writing off debts so as to start with a clean sheet, or rescheduling payments.
- ▶ We will never issue a summons to a care leaver, as long as you are prepared to engage in serious discussion about how to manage your responsibilities sensibly.

If you are experiencing difficulties with paying Council Tax, you will be helped through support tailored to your individual needs.





HOUSING BENEFIT

Housing Benefit will pay all or part of your rent costs depending on how much other income you have.

If you just receive Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) or Employment Support Allowance (ESA) which is income based, or Income Support, you will get the whole of your rent paid less any charges that are included in your rent that are not housing costs, such as payments to your landlord for gas, electric or water bills. This is usually known as a service charge.

As a care leaver your rent will be paid directly to your carer or landlord.

If you are receiving a training allowance or are in work, the amount of housing benefit you get will depend on how much you earn each

week. Generally every £1 you earn over the applicable amount (this is the same as the JSA rate plus £5) means 65p is taken off the amount housing benefit pay you.

See the Portsmouth City Council online calculator to help you work out what you are entitled to at forms.portsmouth.gov.uk/wbc

Something to be aware of if you decide to live independently in the community is the cost of your rent. There is a maximum amount of help you can receive with your rent, depending on the size and age of your household, and the kind of home you are living in. This is called the Local Housing Allowance (LHA). The maximum that any single person under 35 or living in shared accommodation can claim is called the shared accommodation rate, and is currently £68.50 per week. However, as a care leaver, until you turn 22 you will be exempt from this so you can receive up to the one bedroom LHA rate, which is currently £115.38 per week. Once you turn 22 you would have to find the difference yourself as housing benefit would then drop to the shared accommodation rate.

To make a claim for housing benefit you need to complete a form available from the Civic Offices – ask at reception and they will tell you where to go if you would like some help completing the form. Make sure you tick the box for care leaver so that your claim will be dealt with by one person whose job it is to make sure that the claim is paid quickly so your carer or landlord are not waiting too long for their rent.

If your circumstances change, for example you lose your job, you must tell Housing Benefit immediately so they can change your claim. If you are having problems and find your rent is not being paid, go to the Civic Offices or your area Housing Office and ask to see someone in the Housing Benefit department or call them on 023 9283 4556.

CLAIMING BENEFITS

PREGNANT?

If you are pregnant and under 18, you can claim Income Support from the date the baby is born. If you are over 18, you can claim Income Support from 11 weeks before the due date. You can also get a Health in Pregnancy Grant to help with costs of keeping healthy during your pregnancy and a Sure Start maternity grant, which is a one-off payment to help you buy things you will need for the baby, such as a cot. These do not need to be repaid.

Once the baby is born you can claim Child Benefit for your child if they live with you and Child Tax Credits. Contact your Job Centre Plus.



ILL OR DISABLED?

At 18 you can claim Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) if you are sick or disabled under special rules called youth provisions. You will need a "fit note" from your doctor saying why you cannot work. It is best to talk to someone at the job centre about this.

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) is paid to anyone under 65 who needs help to look after themselves, or needs help getting around. If this applies to you, talk to the job centre or visit gov.uk/benefits-calculators

PASSPORT

Before you leave care your social worker will either have applied for a passport for you or help you apply for a passport, because although you might not travel abroad it is a very useful form of ID. Sometimes when you have been in care it can take longer to get a passport because of checking parental details or if you have had several different names. The post office offers a checking service where they can look over your application before sending it off which might be useful. Visit gov.uk and search 'passport'.

SAVINGS

Whilst you were in care you should have been supported to set up a savings account. When you leave care your carer should give you the savings book. This will be different for each of you dependent on how successful you have been at saving.

DISCRETIONARY PAYMENTS

This is when we might consider helping you to pay for things that improve your life experience.

Our expectation will be that as a Care Leaver, you are entering the adult world and you will be focusing on the things that will help you to become fully independent, such as undertaking work or training, if you are not in full time education. As a concerned parent we would expect you to be open and share information which will help us to help you.

Things that we could consider payments/contributions for if they are in your Pathway Plan are:

- ▶ Accessing Education, Training or employment
- ▶ Setting up home
- ▶ Maintaining contact with important people
- ▶ Making use of leisure facilities
- ▶ Buying specialist services such as counselling
- ▶ Specialist equipment for employment or training.
- ▶ Topping up wages in cases where someone is in employment and on a low wage.

If there are other things that you would like us to help with, discuss this with your Personal Adviser and then put together a case to convince the Head of Looked After Children's Services that this is going to be a sensible investment in you.

For those of you aged 18 to 21 your PA should work with you to assess your financial needs and they will help you to make sure you are receiving all your entitlements such as benefits before we can consider any financial support. For us to do this you will need to agree to share information about your financial circumstances with us, otherwise we will be unable to help you other than through entitlements such as your Care Leaver's Grant.

ASYLUM SEEKING CARE LEAVER ENTITLEMENTS

If your immigration status has been resolved to allow you right of residency in the UK, you will be expected to claim benefits and will receive support from us in the same way as any other care leaver.

If you are still waiting for the outcome of your application or extension of leave to remain, we can continue to support you as a care leaver.

If at age 18 you have not made your application or your application has been refused and/ or you have no further right of appeal and no longer have recourse to public funds, we will assess your situation and discuss your options with you. We will also refer you to the Refugee Council for support and guidance.

You will be entitled to funding for: completing English courses, accommodation, professional development and to enable volunteering work.

TYPES OF ACCOMMODATION

Where you are living and where you want to live will be one of the most important things you need to think about as you approach 18. There are a number of options available, you may be currently living in one of these options or you may want to plan to live there in the future.

FOSTER CARE

Many young people remain in foster care until their 18th birthday. Now under Portsmouth Staying Put Policy you can be supported to remain living with your foster carer, if that is what both of you want, until you are 21. If this is something you would like to consider, then please speak to your social worker.

SUPPORTED LODGINGS

There are different types of supported lodgings. Some are a room in a family home where you are member of the household but not a member of the family, so you are more independent. These types of lodgings will provide you with meals but they may expect you to do things like your own washing or help with housework. This is to prepare you for living more independently in the future. Supported lodgings can help you decide what skills you need to develop and give you the chance to learn and practise these skills. Others provide less support and opportunities to develop skills and may just provide a daily visit.

SHARED LIVES

Your social worker may assess you are eligible for supported accommodation through the Shared Lives scheme. This would involve living in a carer's home where you would be provided with additional support to help you live independently depending on your needs.

SUPPORTED HOUSING

In Portsmouth we have a variety of different supported housing services that make up the Young Persons Supported Housing Pathway. They vary in size and levels of support. To access the supported housing pathway, your social worker would need to make an application with you to the Young Persons Supported Housing Panel.

Many of the services have a waiting list so it is advisable to apply a few months before you are likely to need the accommodation and this should be picked up in your Pathway Plan. Supported living services are for all young people in Portsmouth aged 16-25, not just for young people in or leaving care. You will all be treated the same and expected to follow the terms of your licence agreement. All supported living services provide an individual bedroom, and either shared bathroom and/or kitchen facilities. Most have a staff office and a communal living area with television and games.

Below is a table which sets out the different types of accommodation and the levels of support they offer.

	Units	Staffed 24 hrs a day	Shared kitchens	Access
All Saints Hostel	22	Yes	Yes	Housing panel
The Portsmouth Foyer	48	Yes	Yes	Housing panel
Victoria Road South	7	Yes	Yes	Housing panel

When thinking about supported accommodation you need to remember:

- ▶ All of the services have rules designed to ensure everyone can live there peacefully without disturbing each other or the neighbours. You also have to make use of the support available, and this is also a condition of your licence agreement to be able to live in any supported housing service. If you consistently break the house rules or the things written in the licence agreement you may be asked to leave. If you are asked to leave, you will get only 28 days' notice and will have to find somewhere else - which is not an easy task. It is actually easier to stick with the service rules than find somewhere else to live in Portsmouth at short notice.

- ▶ You will have to pay rent each week. Social care will pay this for you until you become 18, but you still have to pay a service charge each week from your personal allowance to cover the cost of your gas, electricity and water. This is to help you get into the routine of paying rent regularly. Once you are 18 you have to make a benefits claim in your own right if you are not working and pay all of your rent yourself from the benefits or training allowances. If you do not pay your rent you will eventually be asked to leave the service.
- ▶ Staff are there to provide you with support to help you manage your tenancy, develop the skills you need to live independently and support you with finding and maintaining education, training or employment. All services provide you with a key worker and you will be expected to meet with them regularly to review your licence agreement and to work on skills. If you consistently refuse to meet them or participate in the support provided you will also be asked to leave the accommodation.
- ▶ As your independent living skills develop, you will start to need less support and so your keyworker, with your social worker, will work with you to plan for you moving to the next stage of the supported housing pathway, which is the next step towards you living independently. For some young people, this may include moving to a self-contained property in the community, but where support remains available such as the Boost Project. For others this could be private sector accommodation.
- ▶ When you are ready to leave the pathway and live in accommodation without needing any support, your PA will work with you to look at the options and help you to identify the right option for you. This may be finding a private sector landlord to rent a property from, or, for a few young people, it might be social housing. The Young Persons Housing Panel can only nominate a very small number of young people to the council's housing register so it is not an option for many of the young people who are leaving the supported housing pathway. The decision about who is nominated is based upon the panel understanding which young people have the greatest need for social housing.

You have to be at least 18 to hold a tenancy which is why most young people go through a supported living service first to develop their skills ready to move on to a tenancy if they are ready at 18. Some young people may need support for a longer period of time and so may not be ready to look at living independently at 18.

SHARED HOUSING

Opportunities to live in shared accommodation which is leased with up to 4/5 other young people who you are matched with.

PRIVATE SECTOR ACCOMMODATION

Another option is to rent from a private landlord. This can be a good option if you are in work as the rent can be cheaper than supported living services. This will often be a shared house where you have your own room but share a kitchen and living areas with other people in the house.

If you are not in work, housing benefit support is limited to the shared room rate for anyone under 35, so if your rent is more than this you will have to make up the difference yourself. You need to be 18 to hold a tenancy. Some organisations will let to people under 18 on a sublet basis; your social worker will have details of these organisations.

You can access private sector accommodation yourself through a letting agency, online or advertisement in the newspaper or shop windows. Be careful with letting agencies as they will charge you a fee for finding you a property.

Some places are let partly furnished. With all properties you will usually have to pay a deposit. You can talk to your PA about this or contact Housing Options or Portsmouth Homeless Day Service to ask them about the Rent Bond Scheme. You can also use some of your leaving care grant towards a deposit.

When you sign a tenancy agreement, read it through or get someone to read it on your behalf. Make sure your landlord has told you where your deposit will be held (your landlord must tell you within 14 days of your tenancy starting, in writing, where they are holding your deposit). Take photos of each room and check any inventory you are asked to sign as when you leave if something's missing the landlord can take it out of your deposit. Also if the property has not been looked after and there is any damage your landlord can apply to keep some or all of your deposit to be able to cover the costs of any damage you have caused, so make sure you both agree the conditions of the property when you sign the tenancy.

SETTING UP HOME

Portsmouth City Council gives every care leaver £2,000 to help them live independently. Most young people use this money to furnish their first home but some people take bits of the money at different times. For example if you are moving into a furnished bedsit you would only need pots and pans and bedding, so you might prefer to use some of the money to buy equipment for your college course or for driving lessons.

You might keep £1,000 back for when you leave supported accommodation and need furniture for your own unfurnished flat.

If you are working and/or have spent some of your grant previously and need furniture, the Salvation Army Citadel Project at the top of Commercial Road can help. They sell affordable second-hand furniture and will try to give you a discount if you are on benefits, but you will still need to make some payment to them. You can call them on 023 9289 0953. You can also find good deals online via Gumtree and Freecycle.

BOOST PROJECT

The Boost project provides a key worker to work with you to help you to live independently. They will work with you for as long as needed and you can choose the frequency and time of your appointments. They will also work around college or work commitments. Boost can help with budgeting, cooking, benefits, form filling and other life skills. You need to be referred by your social worker.

When you have shown social workers that you can live independently and pay your bills they will sign the tenancy over to you permanently.

STAYING CLOSE: ASPIRATION PROJECT

This is a service that supports 10 young people each year in shared housing when leaving care. There is a team around you to offer advice, guidance and support in order that you can be prepared for independent living.

YOUR EDUCATION

Whatever you do in the future you should always try to keep learning – whether it is through an academic or practical skills course. Qualifications will help you to have more choices in your life about where you want to work and what sort of work you would like to do.

THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL

The Virtual School provides personalised support and guidance to young people as they transition to further education, employment or training. The team ensures there is consistent high quality support so that young people can achieve their goals. There is a drop in advice service including telephone consultation every Tuesday morning from 9am to 11am.

If you have any queries or questions, or would like advice and guidance on any aspect of post-18 education you can contact Tina Henley, who is the Virtual School and College Headteacher.

Phone: **023 9268 8076**

Email: **tina.henley@portsmouthcc.gov.uk**

APPRENTICESHIPS

From August 2018, care leavers will receive a £1,000 bursary payment if they choose to do an apprenticeship.

The extra financial support will be for those aged 16–24 and will help them in the first year of their apprenticeship as they transition into the workplace for their practical studies.

We are committed to supporting and developing apprenticeships and if you meet the requirements, you are guaranteed to be invited to interview. Check out our website for further information: **portsmouth.gov.uk/careers**

GOING TO UNIVERSITY

Money

(all amounts are subject to change)

If you decide to go to university you will be supported by your PA to apply for student loans to cover your course fees and your living costs. You can apply for a tuition fee loan, which is currently up to £9,250 per year, and a maintenance loan, which is dependent on your household income. You will need to pay this back once you leave university and start earning a certain amount – currently this is £21,000 per year. Your repayments are calculated at a percentage each year – so you won't be paying off the whole loan in one go.

Do I get any help?

Most universities will offer bursaries for care leavers - these do not have to be repaid. Amounts will differ between universities. For example, the University of Portsmouth currently offers a bursary of £1,700 per year; the University of Glasgow offers £1,000; the University of Brighton offers £2,000 for the first year and £1,000 thereafter. Some also have other financial support specific to care leavers.

Will I get any help?

As a care leaver, there is a lot of help and support available at universities to help you get to university, stay there and succeed.

Support available could include: a named contact, pre-application



support, outreach sessions, additional funding, financial advice etc. Outreach activities are activities such as summer school, campus tours and taster days, which allow you to 'try' before you apply to make sure that university is suitable for you. When you are at university, you will also have access to other support that is available to all students, such as health services, academic support and careers advice.

You can find out what support the different universities provide for care leavers on propel.org.uk

Where will I live?

Universities will offer care leavers university accommodation, (usually in halls of residence if they have this), including over the holidays. If they cannot offer this, they will help you to find a suitable place to live.

Unite is a student accommodation provider. They provide a number of scholarships which pay for accommodation for 3 years at a partner university, including over holidays. There are currently 28 universities in the scheme, including Portsmouth and Bournemouth. Find out more by visiting unitefoundation.co.uk/get-a-scholarship

Remember your social worker, PA or the through care team's progression adviser can support you with all of this.

WORK EXPERIENCE

Did you know Portsmouth City Council offer you work experience placements? The Through Care team's very own progression adviser is able to organise a placement within the council. Speak with your social worker or PA to find out more. But in the meantime here's a little information for you.

Roles currently include:

- ▶ security officer
- ▶ estate service officer.

We offer work experience opportunities through Southern Co-operative in a range of different areas.

'Take over' opportunities are available to care leavers who are aspiring to be managers or leaders and want to shadow or take over from managers in different roles within the Council.

CARE LEAVERS' COVENANT

The council is committed to the principles of the care leavers' covenant, which supports young people from care to independence.

In order to help young people develop the confidence and resilience to face the challenge of earning a living and making their way in society, we will work with local businesses to strengthen the opportunities of work experience and apprenticeships locally and across the country for those young people living away from Portsmouth.

We'll be seeking the commitment of local businesses to increase the range of opportunities available. Each organisation will commit to a support package that is tailored to its specific expertise.

HEALTH ASSESSMENT

All young people in care are entitled to a full medical assessment every year up until the age of 18 (LAC medical).

This assessment should look not only at your physical health, but also at your emotional health. It will then be written up and used to help decide if any available services could help you to improve your health.

The LAC medical is usually carried out at Battenberg Clinic, however they can be done in the home setting if that is preferred.

After the age of 18, or after coming off of a care order your general health will come under the care of your GP. You will be supported to join a GP practice if you change address. You will be given a copy of your final health assessment, which outlines your medical history so you fully understand your own health needs.

You will also be supported to register with a dentist if you do not already have one or need to change.

HEALTH SERVICES

There are a variety of health services in Portsmouth you can access for specific or general health needs.

The GP is a good place to start for most ailments, illnesses or small injuries, but they are not your only option.

Pharmacies can offer advice on a wide range of issues from minor ailments, to advice on medications, stopping smoking and sexual health. Often if you have a non-serious ailment, these are good places to go for some advice before booking a doctor's appointment, which may have a long waiting time. Most pharmacies have a private room where the pharmacist can discuss any private issues with you.

There is a treatment centre at St Mary's Hospital for minor injuries. You do not need an appointment as it is a walk-in service, but it does mean you will have to wait to be seen. The centre can offer help with lots of different illnesses/injuries and you should attend here if your illness/injury cannot wait until you can see your GP.

The A&E department in Portsmouth is based at Queen Alexandra Hospital. If you have to call an ambulance or have a serious accident or ailment you will go there.

The main sexual health clinic in Portsmouth is based at St Mary's Hospital. You can attend here without an appointment or book for a time. (See sexual health section for more in-depth info around sexual health facilities.)

If you are concerned about a non-urgent problem, but need help and advice, you can call the NHS helpline on 111. 999 should only be called for emergencies requiring an ambulance.

Where to go and who to talk to about your sexual health

- ▶ Check out letstalkaboutit.nhs.uk for a wide range of information and support, including free contraception, STI testing and treatment, and how to access local sexual health services (including the young people's clinic)
- ▶ Your GP – to discuss contraception or concerns you may have regarding your sexual health
- ▶ Pharmacies – for condoms, emergency contraception and treatment for conditions such as thrush
- ▶ St Mary's walk in clinic – for emergency contraception
- ▶ Looked after nurse
- ▶ Your PA

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health covers a huge amount of symptoms. The most important thing to remember is that if you feel your mental or emotional wellbeing is suffering, there is a lot of help out there. Mental health issues can often have a stigma, but it is nothing to be embarrassed about, and like many physical illnesses, the quicker you get help the easier it is to sort the problem.

Your GP is a great place to start if you feel you may need some help around mental health. Some people may benefit from prescription drugs to help manage symptoms, whereas others may just need someone to talk to. Your GP can refer you to other services and prescribe drugs if needed.

Portsmouth's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) is dedicated to young people up to the age of 18 to help you to address behaviour, feelings and emotions and explore why you feel or act a certain way. However, if you are actively involved with them before 18 years, they will help you in your transition to Adult Services.

Talking Change is a service for adults over 18 suffering from depression or anxiety. You can be referred by your GP or self-refer by completing a pack available from your GP or online (search 'Talking Change Portsmouth').

Your PA should be the first person you speak to if you are having any health, smoking, alcohol or drug issues. They will know of all the help and support available to you and can put you in touch with the right services.

WELLBEING SERVICE

The Wellbeing Service operates from venues across Portsmouth and is a free service. They offer one-to-one appointments, group sessions and drop-in clinics. The focus in the Wellbeing Service is on education and achievable goals, which can enable long-term change.

The Wellbeing Service can also support you to improve your emotional wellbeing as stress and poor sleep are more likely to drive unhealthy behaviours. The service can link with other council departments and organisations to help you deal with wider issues such as housing, employment and managing money as we know that some people use unhealthy behaviours to deal with problems in these areas.

Call **023 9229 4001** or email **wellbeing@portsmouthcc.gov.uk**

OTHER SERVICES IN PORTSMOUTH TO HELP WITH EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

PARCS

PARCS offers confidential counselling for anyone aged 13–24 who has experienced sexual abuse.

Website: parcs.org.uk

Women's line: [023 9266 9511](tel:02392669511)

Men's line: [023 9266 9516](tel:02392669516)

Barnardos

Barnardos offers confidential 1:1 support for anyone experiencing, or at significant risk of sexual exploitation

Phone: [01489 796684](tel:01489796684)

SSJ

SSJ (Society of St James) offers a wide range of recovery support including group sessions, therapy and activities

Phone: [023 9229 4573](tel:02392294573)

Visit: [Campion Place, Elm Grove, Portsmouth](#)

Talk to Frank

Talk to Frank offers confidential advice about drugs.

Website: talktofrank.com

NHS live well

The NHS Live Well offers advice, tips and tools to help you make the best choices about your health and wellbeing

Website: nhs.uk/livewell

Health Pompey

Health Pompey is a one-stop shop for looking after your health

Website: portsmouth.gov.uk and search for 'Healthy Pompey'



Drink Aware

Drink Aware is an independent charity that helps people make better choices about drinking.

Website: [drinkaware.co.uk](https://www.drinkaware.co.uk)

Let's Talk About It

Let's Talk About It offers sexual health information and advice, as well as a clinic finder.

Website: [letstalkaboutit.nhs.uk](https://www.letstalkaboutit.nhs.uk)

Safer Portsmouth Partnership

Safer Portsmouth Partnership offers information on relationships, including the 'Is This Love' test

Website: [saferportsmouth.org.uk](https://www.saferportsmouth.org.uk)

RELATIONSHIPS

Becoming an adult can be an exciting but challenging time and sometimes you might need a little help along the way. Your PA will be in contact with you at least every eight weeks, to see how you are, and to ensure the support detailed in your pathway plan is in place. This could be via the phone, or a visit to your home or in the community. If you feel you need more time and support from your PA, this contact could be more often and you can agree a plan together.

Your PA can also help you to maintain or regain contact with those important to you, and maybe those you want to call on for support too. This might be family, friends, or people that have cared for and supported you. Your PA can also help you in making new friends and accessing support in your community. This could be by finding groups or clubs you might be interested in such as the gym, football, arts, photography, music etc.



CONTACTS

Young Minds

Offering support to young people who are experiencing mental health difficulties or have family members experiencing mental health difficulties.

Contact: **020 7336 8445**

Child Line

Child Line provides confidential telephone counselling services for any child or young person with any problems.

Contact: Freephone: **0800 1111** (24 hours)

Youth to Youth Helpline

A confidential helpline run by young people for young people up to 19 years of age who need emotional support.

Contact: **020 8896 3675** (Monday and Thursdays 6.30–9.30pm).

FRANK

Confidential information and advice for anyone concerned by their own or someone else's drug or solvent misuse.

Contact: Freephone **030 0123 6600** (24 hour service)

Bullying UK

Get advice and support about bullying whenever you need it.

Contact: bullying.co.uk, join a live online chat or call **080 8800 2222**

Samaritans

A confidential, 24-hour emotional support service for any person in distress, crisis or at risk of suicide.

Contact: **116 123**

CRUSE Bereavement Care

CRUSE Young Helpline for young people aged 12–18. Offers counselling, information and advice to anyone who has been bereaved and those who care for them.

Contact: **080 8808 1677**

AND FINALLY...

We hope that everything goes well for you and you find some of the things in this manual useful.

If you have been unhappy about something you can talk to your social worker, your independent reviewing officer or a member of the Participation Team. If you find this does not resolve your issue or you wish to make a complaint, you can contact the complaints managers.

Call: **023 9268 8422**

Email: **csccomplaints@portsmouthcc.gov.uk**

Write: The Complaints Manager, Social Care, Civic Offices, Guildhall Square, Portsmouth PO1 2ZX

This booklet was put together by Portsmouth City Council's Participation Team with help from young people from the Children in Care Council, colleagues within Portsmouth City Council and CAMHS.

For comments or amendments to information in this pack please contact the Participation Team.

Email: **cicc@portsmouthcc.gov.uk**

Call: **023 9268 8803**

Write: The Participation Team Children's Social Care Civic Offices
Guildhall Square PO1 2EA

If you would be interested in getting involved in making services better for looked after children, or you feel that you would like to share your experiences of being a looked after child or a care leaver, please contact Adam Murphy on **adam.murphy@portsmouthcc.gov.uk** or **07710 199915** to have a discussion about how to get involved.