

Care Leavers Financial Entitlements Handbook

2023–24



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Introduction

We take our Corporate Parenting role very seriously and in 2021 we developed a Corporate Parenting Strategy, setting out how we aspire to be the best parents we can be. There are six ambitions of the Corporate Parenting Strategy. As your corporate parent we will do our best to help you become a secure and confident young adult, we want to support you by providing opportunities for you to thrive and give you the best life chances. This handbook sets out the financial support that is available to you as a Lewisham care leaver to help you move to independence.

The handbook has two parts:

Part one is aimed at 18 - to 24-year-olds

Part two is for 16 - & 17-year-olds eligible for Leaving Care Services

Who is entitled to support?

If you are a care leaver, aged between 16 – 25 years old. To qualify for this support, you must be:

Eligible

Aged 16 or 17 and currently looked after, either on a Care Order (Section 31 of the Children Act 1989) or accommodated (Section 20). To be 'Eligible' you must have been looked after for a period of 13 weeks, or periods amounting in total to 13 weeks, which began after your 14th birthday and ended after your 16th birthday.

Relevant

Aged 16 or 17 and you have left care, having previously been in the category of 'Eligible Child'.

A Former Relevant Care Leaver

A young person aged between 18 to 21 who has left care having previously been either 'Eligible', 'Relevant' or both. Or if you are aged between 21 to 25 and in full time education, or you have requested personal adviser support.

Qualifying

Aged 16 – 21, either where a Special Guardianship Order was in place when you reached 18 years old, and you had been looked after immediately before the makings of that Order.

Or, at any time after reaching the age of 16 you were no longer looked after, accommodated, or fostered.

Care Leavers aged 18–24

Financial Support

We will financially support you in several ways, including help for the cost of further and higher education, including a higher education bursary/ grant, and rent costs during holiday periods.

We will give you a Setting up Home Grant when you move into your first independent property and help with the cost of living in semi-independent accommodation (aged 16/17).

We will pay for some driving lessons, key identification documents and a contribution to celebrations, birthdays, and other festivities.

For all young people aged 16/17 years living with a foster carer, family carers, living in semi-independent, independent, or residential care, your pocket money and living allowances will be given to you to help you develop the skills you require to manage your finances and help pay a financial contribution towards your living costs.

Financial arrangements for care leavers, who have remained living with their former foster carers under a 'Staying Put' arrangement, are outlined in the Staying Put policy and will be included in your Staying Put Agreement, which will be agreed with you, your foster carers, PA and social worker.

Where possible any allowances will be paid directly into your bank account.

Identification and legal documents

We all need some key documents to prove our age, work permissions and any benefit entitlements. Your social worker and/or PA will make sure you have all your necessary paperwork. With you, they will make the initial application for all the key documents you need, and we will pay the cost for:

- Passport / travel documents (including renewal of travel documents and first adult passport)
- Provisional driving license (as essential photographic ID)
- Copy of a birth certificate (if required)
- Deed Poll certificate (if deemed necessary)
- A National Insurance numbers. At the age of 15 and 9 months, your social worker will make a request for this on your behalf.

Your social worker and PA will keep copies of these documents on your individual confidential record, for reference and in case you lose any of them

Your health and access to community resources in your local area is important to us. As part of our offer, we promote free Leisure and Gym membership (to those residing in the borough and up to your 25th birthday). You can access Sydenham, Lewisham, Deptford and Downham leisure facilities if you request this from your PA. For those living outside of Lewisham, a contribution can be made towards a gym membership providing this is set out in your Pathway Plan. We also have a dedicated Leaving Care Nurse available to signpost you to health services as required. Please speak with your PA as we will need your consent to access this support.

Care Leavers who are pregnant and parents

Care leavers on benefits, or on a low income may be entitled to a Sure Start Maternity Grant to purchase what is needed for their first baby. This can be accessed via your community midwife and claimed from 11 weeks before the birth, until the

baby is 3 months old. It is not payable until after your baby is born. You will not have to repay this amount and it does not affect other benefits or tax credits. Further information is available <https://www.gov.uk>

Other health costs

Care leavers who are under the age of 19 and in full time education will generally be exempt from NHS charges. Some care leavers may be able to claim assistance from the NHS low-income scheme and request forms HC1 (SC) and HC1. If you are a lone parents or unwell, and in receipt of Universal Credit you will be exempt and do not have to pay any NHS charges. Full details of the help available will be found in the form HC11 'Help with Health Costs?' which is available from Post Offices, Job Centre Plus offices, hospitals, or GP surgeries. You can also speak with the Leaving Care Nurse and your PA for more information and advice.

Accommodation

Prescription costs

From June 2023, if you meet the eligibility criteria (aged 18 to 25 years), you are entitled to receive a certificate that enables you to get free prescriptions. Please speak with your PA for more details.

Birthday and Festivity Allowances (18 – 25)

The following annual birthday and festivity allowances (e.g. Christmas or Eid) will usually be paid.

18th birthday	£50.00
19th, 20th	£25.00
21st birthday	£60.00
Annual Festive Allowance	£30.00

Clothing

At the age of 18 you will be expected to set aside money (from your employment, Maintenance Allowance, Universal Credit/other benefits you may receive) to buy clothing. In some instances, you may need some extra help, for example for a job interview or a significant celebration event, like Graduation. In some circumstances we can support you to buy specific clothing, this will be based on your individual circumstances and will be up to a total of £300 a year. Please speak with your PA to find out more

‘Setting Up Home Grant’**

When you have your own tenancy, or your name is on a tenancy agreement. A grant of £2,000 will be available towards the cost of setting up your home. This is a one-off grant that can only be accessed once (unless in exceptional circumstances). The grant is for essential items such as a fridge, cooker and a bed. In addition, we will pay the cost of the first year’s television license fee, Wi-Fi (if needed to support your studies) and the cost of installing your cooker.

You can plan out with your PA how your grant will be spent, and they can guide you how to budget effectively. Your grant can be released and spent in stages. If your grant has not been fully used by your 21st birthday, you can still access it up to your 25th birthday to use for the same purpose.

Rent and deposit

If you are unable to access your own permanent accommodation (Priority Housing Nomination) in Lewisham (which will need to be evidenced), we will provide the first month’s

rent and a deposit for private rented accommodation, up to a maximum of £2500. The actual amount will be subject to a financial assessment, and we will need to be confident you can afford the rent going forward to receive this support.

Moving: Removal and Storage Costs

We will help pay for you to transport and store some of your belongings; for up to a maximum of one year and cover costs for this up to £2000. We can help arrange transport to move your belongings if you need it and we will directly pay to the removal company. *Note: We will not be responsible for any loss or damage to property that has been stored on your behalf.*

Council Tax

All care leavers living in Lewisham are exempt from paying council tax up to their 25th birthday.

If you live outside of Lewisham, because we have made those arrangements on your behalf, we will pay your Council Tax. If you live

outside of Lewisham of your own choice, we can check with your local Council to see if they offer a similar scheme and support you to negotiate what support can be offered. If no support is available in your local area, we can pay up to 80% of your Council Tax depending on your individual circumstances.

Accommodation allowance for those in university.

If you are above the age of 18 and become a student in Higher Education (University) you will be entitled to a holiday allowance which consists of financial support towards rent outside of term time (when not in university). This is up to £150 per week, for 18 weeks in the calendar year (paid at Easter 3 weeks, Summer 12 weeks, and Christmas 3 weeks), and where possible will be paid directly to the property owner/ landlord. You will need written proof which you need to share with your PA of the cost of your rent and from Student Finance England (SFE), with details of payments relating to

this. If you gain employment (or are undertaking a paid Internship as part of your university course, the amount you will receive, will depend on how much you are earning (means tested).

If you are studying on-line (not travelling to university and are in your own tenancy), you will not be entitled to receive the holiday allowance. This will not be payable if you are in Staying Put, living with a Supported Lodgings carer, or in semi-independent accommodation, or if you are able to claim Housing Benefit as a single parent or part of a couple, or if your rent is /can be covered in any other way.

Driving Lessons

If the need to drive is linked to you being able to secure education, training, or employment (either related to a course of study/training, or if the offer of employment depends on you being able to drive). As part of your pathway plan will pay for you to:

- take 5 driving lessons (the 6th to 11th lessons)
- the cost of your provisional licence
- One a Theory and one Driving Test.

To secure this support, we need to see that you are committed to learning to drive and show that you have a confirmed training or job offer (a letter or other form of documentation). You will need to pay for the first 5 lessons, and we will pay for the next 5. Your personal Advisor will book the latter 5 lessons (payment for these will be directly to the driving school/company).

Education, training, apprenticeships and employment

We are committed to supporting you in your education, training and work and appreciate that you may need some help to get you started. With support from your Social Worker, Carer and/or PA, we will help you plan how you will budget. We will do a financial assessment with you to look at your income, outgoings and what additional support you may be entitled to.

If you are studying or planning to, depending on the outcome of the financial assessment you could receive a contribution towards the cost of your course. We will pay for any registration and/or examination fees up to £2000. This will not apply, if you are already receiving a bursary/ grant and the initial costs for course equipment, books, and essential materials, prior to receipt of the 16-19 Bursary, Discretionary Learner Support Fund, or earnings if on an apprenticeship. Your PA will explore with you where you can access additional funding through colleges, charities, and trusts.

Apprenticeships

An apprenticeship is paid employment with the advantage of being able to learn as you earn. There are now lots of apprenticeship opportunities across a wide and varied range of vocational areas at intermediate, advanced, higher or degree level.

Your employer should offer you an apprenticeship agreement to sign as your contract of employment. If you are employed through a training provider, they should be recognised on the National Register for Apprenticeship Training Agencies. Care leavers aged 16-24 who start an apprenticeship will receive a £1000 bursary/ grant to help the move into the workplace. This is paid through the employer/training provider.

Traineeship

If you are not quite ready to start an apprenticeship, a traineeship programme is also a good way of building your skills and confidence to get you ready for work. Traineeships are designed to prepare you to do an apprenticeship. They are

unpaid; however, some colleges and employers pay a training allowance or may cover other costs such as travel or lunch during the work placement. Traineeships can last between six weeks and one year.

Care to Learn – childcare funding and Learner Support Fund

For young parents who are aged 19 or younger, on the day their course of learning begins and subject to residency conditions, there is weekly support is available to cover childcare costs per child. Further details are available at www.gov.uk/care-to-learn

If you are aged 19 or over and are finding it difficult to access further education or training due to funding, those in financial hardship can access this fund which covers travel, essential course equipment, materials, wifi, laptop, childcare funding (of OFSTED approved childcare provision) and support in emergencies. Colleges and training providers set their own criteria, this means that the amounts available and

the way funds are allocated may differ between institutions. Further details are available at <https://www.gov.uk/learner-support>

Further Education Free Meals

Free meals may be available from a wide range of post-16 further education providers for students. If you believe that you may be entitled to these then please discuss with your Education Provider.

Studying away from home

Funding is available for those who would like to access specialist courses which are not available in your local area. Further information can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/residential-support-scheme>

Further Education 16-19 Bursary/ Grant

For children looked after and care leavers who meet the criteria, the 16-19 bursary/ grant guarantees £1200 per academic year, on full time further education courses running for 30 weeks or longer at college or 6th form. This funding is provided direct from the education provider. More

information is available at www.gov.uk/1619-bursary-fund.

Travel Costs

Subject to a financial assessment, if you are a student, you can receive the £20 administration for an Oyster travel card or the equivalent for your area. Post-16 learners in full time education or training living and learning in London are entitled to either a 16 – 25 Rail Card, or a 18+ Student Oyster Card, which offers 30% off the cost of adult travel fare (some part-time courses qualify). For those living out of London help may be available from your Local Authority depending on where you live and how far you must travel.

You can also get help with the cost of adult travel fare for a period of up to 6 weeks or until you receive your Oyster card/travel pass for your area, whichever comes sooner (you need to live a reasonable bus journey away from your place of study – more than 3 miles)

Those aged over 21 and wishing to take up learning and further training

Subject to your financial assessment, funding of up to £300 may be accessed to assist any accredited training course. There will also be charitable funding options that could be applied on your behalf if this is required.

Charities and Trusts

Further funding support for further education may be obtained from the following organisations. This list is not exhaustive.

www.capstonecareleaverstrust.org/home

www.reesfoundation.org

www.sparkfoundation.org.uk/

www.skinnershall.co.uk/charities/lawrence-atwell-charity.htm

www.turn2us.org.uk/

www.thedrapers.co.uk/Charities/Applying-For-A-Grant/SWBF.aspx

Please speak with your PA for further information, support and more details about any of these schemes and grants.

Higher Education Support (university)

If you are in Higher Education, we will support you with a Bursary/ grant as follows:

- A £2,000 payment for the first year and £1,000 each subsequent year up to a total of 4 years of continuous study on an agreed undergraduate course (to be paid in termly instalments). This money is supporting your education and is to use it towards the purchase of essential course books and equipment, travel to and from your place of study.
- Practical and financial help to move you and your belongings to your place of study and to move you back at the end of your course.
- *3 weeks contribution towards your rent during the Christmas and Easter breaks, and 12 weeks during the summer period (see section on

Holiday Allowance above).

- If you study via the Open University, we will provide up to a total of £500 towards the cost of books and other related materials (up to 4 years of study, and to your 25th birthday). Note: This amount will be subject to a financial assessment and reviewed annually and will not apply if you are already undertaking a full-time university course/higher education, and/or are in receipt of a Bursary.

Notes: Funding will only be paid for accredited courses and must be discussed with your PA and/or social worker. Part time courses will receive funding support paid pro rata (this does not include online learning). To be eligible for the Bursary, students must be under the age of 25 (this is regardless of the length of your course). Should your course end after your 25th birthday; we support you financially up to the end of the relevant term.

Students are encouraged to access publicly funded courses that are registered with the Skills Funding Agency – most colleges, sixth forms and training providers offer these courses. Lewisham’s support for courses not under the Skills Funding Agency cannot be guaranteed.

Student Loan Company

Both full time and part time undergraduate students will need to apply for a student loan to cover the cost of their tuition fee and living expenses. For students living and studying in England, Student Finance England is the student loan company to use. There is a different process for students from other countries within the United Kingdom. More information and dates for application deadlines can be found at www.gov.uk/student-finance.

Propel

A growing number of further and higher education institutes provide a package of support to undergraduate students who are care leavers, which can include an additional amount

of financial support along with a designated staff member who will acknowledge your care background, whilst keeping your details confidential. More information can be found at www.propel.org.uk.

Benefits while studying

Full time students are not eligible to claim any benefits such as Universal Credit unless under exceptional circumstances. The exceptional circumstances will be if you are claiming Disabled Living Allowance (DLA) due to your disability, or child benefit for any children in your care and if so, these benefits will continue. Full time students are exempt from paying Council Tax (up to their 25th birthday); you will need to speak with your PA who will help you with this.

Accommodation while in education

Details about the different housing options are in the Accommodation section. If you are studying, there are some additional options and things to think about. Talk to your PA about what kind of accommodation

is going to best suit you while you are studying and plans for after you finish studying. Here is some further information about housing for students.

Student Halls of Residence – first year students who are studying further away from home may choose to go into halls of residence for at least the first year of study. We recommend you go to any Open Day’s for your chosen Higher Education Institute and enquire about halls of residence so that you can be clear on what is available, and the costs involved. Your Social Worker and/or PA and Carer can help and guide you with this.

Accessing Independent Housing. If you have not yet made an application for your own tenancy, talk to your PA who will help you to decide the best time for you to do so. If you decide to study away from London, it may be suitable for you to secure a tenancy on completion of your course. Once you have made the application, you will receive a bidding number. You will

then be expected to actively bid on properties in an area you would like to make your home.

Staying Put – If you are going to stay with your foster carer on a full-time basis, or during the holiday periods, as an adult you will be expected to contribute to the household living expenses, talk to your carer in advance and you will need to apply for the maximum student loan available. Details will be agreed when setting up the Staying Put arrangement

Note: For students looking to move into private rented accommodation, Lewisham is unable to act as guarantor. Check with your university or training provider for any guarantor schemes that they may be able to recommend.

Life after University

It is never too early to start planning for your next step after graduation, don’t wait until you reach the end of your course before you think about the next step. Consider doing

work experience at convenient points throughout your studies such as summer internships and work experience programmes to boost your CV and your income. Universities also offer the opportunity of being able to work for them as a student ambassador. University careers services are there to help you decide your next steps.

The Drive Forward Foundation provides employability skills training and support to care leavers across London. Based in the heart of London, they have links to corporate firms that offer interview practice as well as job opportunities. More information is available at <http://www.driveforwardfoundation.com/>.

Post-graduate Financial Support

Further funding for qualifications at post-graduate level will be decided on a case-by-case basis and an application will need to be made. Your PA can help support you with this

Asylum seeking young adults (18 - 21 years)

If you are a former unaccompanied asylum-seeking child and were looked after by Lewisham, you will receive the same support as any young person who been in our care. If you are aged between 18 to 21 and your status in the UK is not settled, you will not be entitled to claim Universal Credit. In these situations, we will provide you up to the equivalent amount of financial support (which will need to be reviewed in your pathway plan or if your circumstances change). We know that you may also experience other challenges and may have specific needs, which we will also support you to manage. Your Social Worker and/or PA will help you to decide how we do this, and this may include asking for the help of other agencies.

Care Leavers in custody

If you are in custody (remanded or sentenced) when aged 16 and up to your 21st birthday, your Social Worker and/or PA will check with the arrangements with establishment where you are and will arrange to visit and support you. We will provide you with £10 a week allowance (up to age 21), which you will receive monthly. A postal order for this amount will be sent to the relevant prison or detention centre administrator.

Resettlement in the community

The Prison Service and Probation will contact the Leaving Care Service to advise us when you are due for release. We will work with Probation to ensure that you have accommodation and financial support to help with your resettlement.

The financial support will be:

- We will pay the equivalent of Universal Credit until your application is approved.
- We will pay your rent until your housing benefit is sorted
- Financial support you with Passports and Photographic ID as and when required.

Financial Entitlements for 16/17-year-olds

Birthday and Festivity Allowances

The following annual birthday and festivity allowances (either one for Christmas or Eid) will usually be paid.

16 years	£50
17 years	£25
Eid or Christmas	£30

General Living Allowances, Pocket Money & Savings

You will be provided with £20 per month Pocket Money, which you will receive from your carer or keyworker where you are living.

If you are in semi-independent accommodation, you have a £60 per week general living allowance this is to help you with the costs of everyday living.

Clothing & Holiday Allowance

If you are living in residential home, you will get an annual clothing allowance of up to £300 per year and an annual leisure/holiday allowance of up to £300.

Care orders at home up to 18th birthday

For children on care orders living at home with their parents or care leavers aged 16/17 who return home, you will receive the same amounts for birthday, festivity and clothing and holiday allowance as young people living away from their families.

Driving Lessons

You will be supported to have driving lessons, as outlined in Part One above

Apprenticeships

Care leavers aged 16-24 who start an apprenticeship will receive a £1000 bursary to help the transition into the workplace. This is paid through the employer/training provider.

Travel Costs to College or Sixth Form

Post-16 learners in full time education or training, living, and learning in London are entitled to the following:
16+ Oyster Card – offers free travel London transport

Discounted Travel

You will be eligible to apply for a 16-25 Rail Card. If you live out of London help may be available from your resident Local Authority depending on where you live and how far you must travel. Your course provider should be able to give you further information.

There is a lot of information included in this document. We want to support and help you as much as possible. All questions are valuable and important, however big, or small. Please do not hesitate to ask and if you have any questions or need more information then please contact your PA and in their absence the Leaving Care Duty Service

Contact details

Lewisham Care Leavers Service

43 Bromley Road, London, SE6 2UA

Duty telephone number is
020 8314 8864

You can either contact your PA , contact duty or drop into the office in Bromley Road during office hours Monday – Friday 9am–5pm .

Glossary

A

Advocate – Someone who helps you voice your opinions and thoughts where you feel you are not being listened to.

Asylum Seeker – A person who has left their home country as a political refugee and is seeking asylum in another.

B

British Citizenship – When you live and work in the UK free of any immigration controls.

C

Care Leaver – A young person who was previously Looked After and has now left the care system.

Children and Social Work Act 2017

A piece of legislation that includes duties to care leavers, including the need for a Local Offer and the requirement to work with you until you turn 25, whether you are in education or not.

Children Act 1989 – The core piece of legislation that serves as the legal framework for all children's social care responsibilities in the UK.

Corporate Parent – An organisation that fulfils the role of parent.

D

Data Protection Act 2018 – The legislation outlining laws with regards to the protection of data in the UK – in mainland Europe it is known as GDPR.

E

EET – When you are in education, employment, or training.

Eligible – Where a young person is 16 or 17 and has been looked after by the local authority for 13 weeks or more after turning 14 and is still being looked after.

F

Former Relevant – Where a young person is aged 18 to 21 and was Eligible or Relevant. They continue to be Former Relevant until they are 25 if they remain in education.

Foster Carer – An individual who is registered to care for and provide a home for Looked After Children.

I

Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) An individual responsible for making sure the work done by the social care professionals in your life is of a high standard, and your life is progressing according to plan.

J

Jobcentre – The place where you go for your benefit meetings.

L

Leaving Care Service – The main service that works with you after you turn 18.

Looked After – When a child has been accommodated by the local authority for a period of at least 24 hours because, for whatever reason, their parents are unable to provide suitable care.

Looked After Child Review – A meeting chaired by the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) who gathers all the relevant professionals together, including the foster carer and looked after child to review general progress in the child's life.

N

Needs Assessment – Where a judgement is made on how you are doing and what support you might need.

NEET – When you are not in education, employment, or training.

NYAS National Youth Advocacy Service – NYAS Portal – <https://service-request.nyas.net/servicegateway> Call HELPLINE on 0808 808 1001 Web: www.nyas.net Facebook: NYAS.yo X (Formerly known as Twitter): @NYASServices

Freephone helpline 0808 808 1001 or email help@nyas.net.

P

Pathway Plan – A plan drawn up between you and your worker to set out achievable life goals.

The plan covers all areas of your life including housing, money, health, and immigration. It is a legal document.

Personal Adviser – Your allocated worker after turning 18; they will be your primary contact and the person to whom you should turn when you need support.

Personal Education Plan (PEP) – A plan drawn up between you, your worker and, usually, your college or 6th form tutor, which sets out specific, achievable targets in relation to your education.

Q

Qualifying – Where a young person aged under 21 (or under 24 if in education) who was not looked after for 13 weeks or more after turning 14 but was looked after for a period when they were 16 or 17.

R

Relevant – Where a young person was Eligible but is no longer looked after and has not returned home and settled for at least six months. This will also include young people who were detained after turning 16 (e.g. in a psychiatric hospital, youth offending institution, etc.) and had been looked after immediately prior to this happening.

S

Setting Up Home Grant – A grant of £2,000 used to pay for furniture, white goods, and other items that you need when you move into independent accommodation.

Social Worker – A professional registered with Social Work England, who supports individuals and their families.

Support Worker – In the context of care leavers, someone who provides practical support with everyday needs (e.g. opening a bank account, budgeting, paying utility bills, etc.).

T

Tenancy Agreement – A contract between you and your landlord. It may be written or oral. The tenancy agreement gives certain rights to both you and your landlord, for example, your right to occupy the accommodation and your landlord's right to receive rent for letting the accommodation.

V

Virtual School – A service within Lewisham Council that provides education support to looked after children and care leavers.

