

Local Offer to our Care Experienced Young People 2024-2025



Find out what you're entitled to
and who's there to help



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Introduction

Lewisham have pledged to explore plans to further improve support and outcomes for care leavers – both in the borough and nationally.

In May 2024, a motion was adopted which pledges the Council to support the call for care experience to be made a Protected Characteristic

If 'care experience' was made a protected characteristic under the Equality Act, people who are in or have been in care would have the same legal protection against discrimination as the other listed characteristics.

While adding its support for this change to national legislation, the council has also committed to treating 'care experience' as though it is a protected characteristic.

“Alongside our existing strong offer of support for care leavers to help them transition into adulthood and independence, this further underlines our commitment to our corporate parenting responsibilities and levelling the playing field for care experienced people.”

When you turn 18 you will no longer be 'looked after' and will now be a care leaver. This reflects you becoming a young adult and means a change in the services and support we can offer you. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 says we should help care leavers until they are 25 years old, even if they're not in education and make sure our offer is clear about what will provide you and publish the offer.

If you are a care leaver in Lewisham, the local offer tells you what services and support you can access for a range of different needs until you are 25. All the information is in one place.

Just because you are leaving care or have left care, does not mean we have stopped caring about you. We want to make sure you feel safe and supported and know where to go to for advice and help.

We have worked together and prepared the local offer with our Children in Care Council and care leavers to make sure the views and needs of care leavers are understood and included in developing the local offer.



Who can get support?

If you are a care leaver, then you will be aged 16–25-year-olds. To qualify for this support, you must be Eligible, or a Former Relevant care leaver. This means you have been in care for a period of 13 weeks (or periods amounting to 13 weeks) which began after you reached 14 and lasted at least one day, after your 16th birthday.

As a Former Relevant care leaver, you will be between 18–21. Support and guidance can also be offered to you up to your 25th birthday.

As someone who was previously in care, but not meeting the criteria above, you may be a 'qualifying' care

leaver; this means you might be able to access support and advice from the leaving care service. This will be based on an assessment of your needs and circumstances.

If you claimed asylum as an unaccompanied child and have been supported by Lewisham Council, you are a care leaver and will receive support.

You can also read this information online at www.lewisham.gov.uk/careleaver and contact other National agencies for advice and support about your entitlement. Details of agencies are included in this offer.

Your Personal Adviser (PA)

While you are in care and looked after, you will be allocated a Personal Adviser (PA) when you reach 17 ½, who will work alongside your social worker to help you prepare for leaving care. When you are 18, your social worker will stop working with you and your allocated PA will continue to support you and see you regularly until you are 21. They will continue some of the role of your social worker and help you to become more independent. They will meet with you at least every 8 weeks. You will work out between you what is the best way to keep in touch. Your PA will offer you advice about the best ways to achieve your goals and will be a reliable adult to support you. They will help you to prepare to live independently.

If you are over 21, you can still get help from us until you are 25. Speak to your PA to discuss how we can best give you support. If you are not sure if you have a PA, contact the Leaving Care Service.

Your pathway plan

A pathway plan is a document that you will complete with your social worker and PA. It includes details about your accommodation, education, training and employment, your safety, money, health, identity, and family/social networks. It will set out your needs, your views, future goals, and what support you'll receive from Lewisham Leaving Care Services. Your pathway plan will be updated regularly and reviewed with you every six months to make sure it's up to date.

Housing and accommodation

Children and young people who are separated from their families must have the opportunity to grow up in stable, safe, and caring homes, which meet their needs and improves their outcomes. Lewisham's Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-2024 states this as a key pledge. As a care leaver you can access a range of housing options and support based on your needs and preferences which include:

- Staying put with your Foster Carer
- Live with a Lewisham Supported Lodgings Carer
- Move into Leaving Care supported accommodation
- Move into Lewisham's Housing Pathway
- Move into a Lewisham Training Flat
- Secure Council or Housing Association accommodation
- Privately rent your own home
- Informally living with family or friends

Your social worker and PA will talk through the different options with you.

We will offer you (see Financial Entitlements Handbook for more details):

- A Setting Up Home Grant of up to £3000 to buy essential items such as, white goods, furniture and for decorating costs
- A discretionary one-off rent and deposit payment to help secure private rented accommodation (see Financial Entitlement Handbook for more details)
- No Council Tax payments until you turn 25
- Help with moving and storage costs
- Wi-Fi (if needed to support your studies – see Financial Offer for more information about funding)
- The cost of installing your cooker.

Rent, bills and benefits.

You will need to use your own income to pay your own rent and bills through employment, benefits, or a combination of both. We have a Benefits Adviser available who can help and give you advice, alongside your social worker or PA. It is very

important to talk to your PA if you have problems with understanding and paying your bills, such as rent, electricity or water. Do not ignore official looking letters, they could be very important.

Types of accommodation explained

Leaving Care Supported Housing Pathway

Supported housing is a unique pathway that helps you gain the skills you need to live independently with security and confidence. Within the pathway, there are several different schemes where you will have access to a keyworker who will work with you to help you gain the skills and knowledge

to live independently, support you with education, training and/or employment and help move you into independent housing when the time is right. There are also specific services for young adults who may be particularly vulnerable, all key workers work alongside you and your PA.

Training flats

You may be able to stay in one of our training flats for up to six months. This will give you the chance to try out independent living to see what you are good at and what you might need more help with. In a training flat



you will be expected to pay for your utilities and food.

Supported Lodgings

You live in a private family home, with a room of your own. The arrangement gives you the opportunity to develop your independence skills with support from the supported lodgings carer such as cooking, managing money and household chores. This is a good option if you like the security of being a member of a household, but you also like having independence.

Permanent accommodation (Priority Housing Nomination)

This is accommodation provided by Lewisham's Housing Department and as a care leaver you have priority to receive a Council or Housing Association property and a permanent tenancy (this is usually after your 19th birthday). This needs to be discussed in more detail with your PA to agree the best time to make an application and you need to check if you are entitled to this. You must be a Former Relevant Care Leaver for priority housing nomination rights.

Privately rented accommodation

If you are unable to access your priority nomination in Lewisham: Privately rented accommodation can be self-contained or shared. Rents can be expensive, and landlords can be choosy about who they let their properties to. You will need to sign a tenancy agreement. A tenancy (or licence) is a legal document which entitles the person (tenant) to live in a property and outlines the responsibilities that go with this. There are different types of tenancy agreements, it is a legally binding document and it's important that you understand it before you sign it. Your PA will be able to support you with this. We can help with a one-off rent and deposit payment to secure private rented accommodation. We'll support you to explore what is your best option and to register with the appropriate service. If you decide to rent privately, you will not normally be able to then access your priority nomination.

If you go to a further education college, we can help you apply for the 16–19 bursary fund

If you would like to go to university, we will help you choose the right course and a university that matches your talents and interests.

We will offer and help you:

- Obtain a student loan to cover tuition and living costs (from Student Finance England)
- Apply for a higher education bursary/ grant of at least £2,000 to go to university by contributing towards the cost of your course, e.g., for registration or examination fees

- Apply for extra funding for education and training from charities and trusts
- With the cost of extra equipment in certain circumstances e.g., specialist books and other materials

Lewisham's Virtual School will also offer you help and guidance (you can speak with your social worker or PA about this)



Student Loan

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Training and employment

If you would like to find a job or a training course, we will offer and help you:

- Through our weekly drop-in sessions (at 43 Bromley Road) with support from the Employability Officer and Targeted Youth Adviser
- Help find work and build your CV
- Prepare for a job interview
- With financial assistance with interview clothes and travel to work or training, if needed
- Ensure that you are considered for apprenticeship schemes within Lewisham Council
- Look for opportunities for work experience at the Council
- Tutors are on hand to help with studies, ESOL and signposting to courses (ask your PA for more details).

- Have the chance to attend and help organise, our yearly Celebrate Success Awards, which celebrates young people's achievements in education, employment, arts, personal development, and participation
- Access to employment support from the Drive Forward Foundation which helps with career opportunities. Visit www.driveforwardfoundation.com
- A Drive Forward Career Coach will also be available at the Leaving Care Hub (43 Bromley Road)

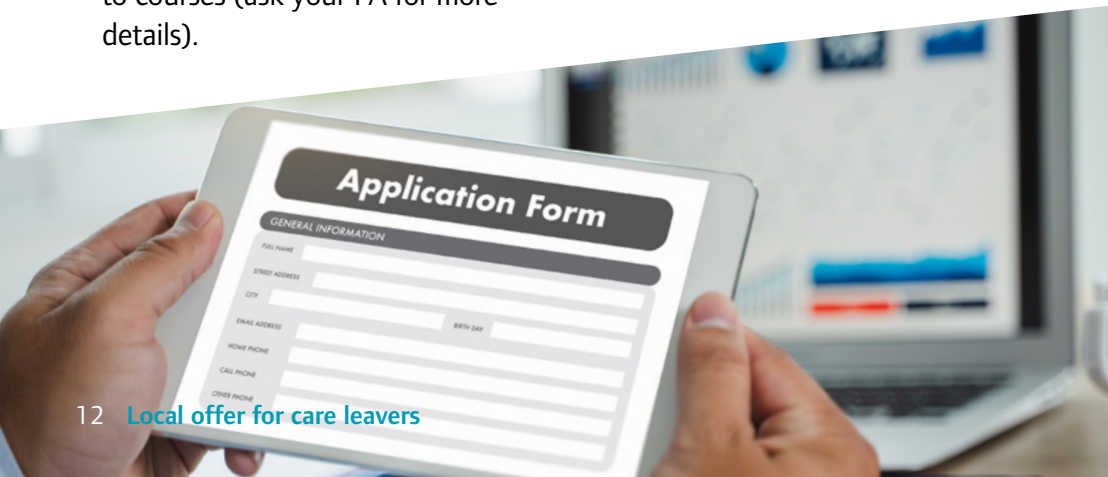
Money, budgeting and managing your finances

Budgeting is a very important skill everyone needs to develop to be able to manage their finances. Budgeting is about having a spending plan for your money, to make sure you always have enough for the things that are important, like food, clothes and somewhere to live. Having a budget or spending plan will also keep you out of debt, as well as help you clear any debts you may have.

You will get help and support from your PA to:

- Access advise and support you on how best to manage your money
- Make sure you are getting all the money you are entitled to

- Receive ongoing support, and if you face a financial emergency your PA will carefully look at what is going on with your money and what support is available
- Open a bank account
- Access Lewisham's Credit Union
- Refer you to our Independence Programme (at 43 Bromley Road)
- Support you to access the Money House Workshop at www.mybnk.org. This will help to prepare you for independent living
- Claim expenses linked with accessing and remaining in education, employment, or training for example, the cost of a clothes for an interview



- Access your Junior ISA, if you have one (a fund of money set aside by the government and the Council).
- Make sure you get a financial gift on birthdays and an annual festivity (either EID or Christmas) if you are between the ages of 18–21

Identification 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 if needed)
- Copy of a birth certificate (if required)
- Deed Poll certificate (if deemed necessary)
- A National Insurance number: 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.

Driving lessons

Learning to drive is expensive. We can help pay for this. We can offer and support you if the need to drive is linked to you being able to secure, your main employment (e.g., related to employment that depends on you being able to drive). As part of your pathway plan we will pay for you to:

- take 5 driving lessons (the 6th to 11th lessons)
- the cost of your provisional licence
- One Theory and one Driving Test
- Help you find an instructor

To secure this support, we need to see that you are committed to obtaining a driving job. 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).



Health and wellbeing

When you leave care, we can help support your physical and mental health and well-being in many ways and will offer and help you with:

- Weekly drop-ins to see the Leaving Care Nurse to support with your physical and mental health
- Make sure you have a leaving care health letter from the Looked After Children Health Team This contains key information from your childhood (for example, when and if you have had immunisations), your current health needs, as well as information about what you need to do to address current health issues and who to contact for further support
- Give you information about healthy living

- Tell you how to apply for free prescriptions
- Help you register with a GP, dentist, and optician.
- Offer free or subsidised access to leisure centres in the borough through the Be Active scheme
- Tell you about health drop-in centres.
- Support you to move from child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) to adult services
- Tell you about counselling services that are available locally
- Refer you to mentoring schemes
- If you had an independent visitor while you were in care, continue to support contact

- If appropriate, help you maintain or regain contact with people who are special to you, or who cared for you in the past, such as former foster carers or social workers
- Help you access the drop-in support service twice a week held at the Leaving Care hub at 43 Bromley Road, where you can go for a chat, have a cup of tea, wash your clothes, make calls, and use the internet.

Most of the support in Lewisham is local and your PA can help you find out more. The Council's website has useful information on health and wellbeing. For example, sexual health, mental health, obesity, drugs and alcohol, diet and exercising, quitting smoking. It also has links with organisations in Lewisham who can offer support. You can find a complete directory of services available in the Borough by going to the NHS website, asking the Leaving Care Nurse or your GP.



Leisure and activities

Get involved

We want to offer you a range of opportunities for you to socialise and enjoy your free time. Groups and social activities are a great way to meet people and develop friendships and interests.

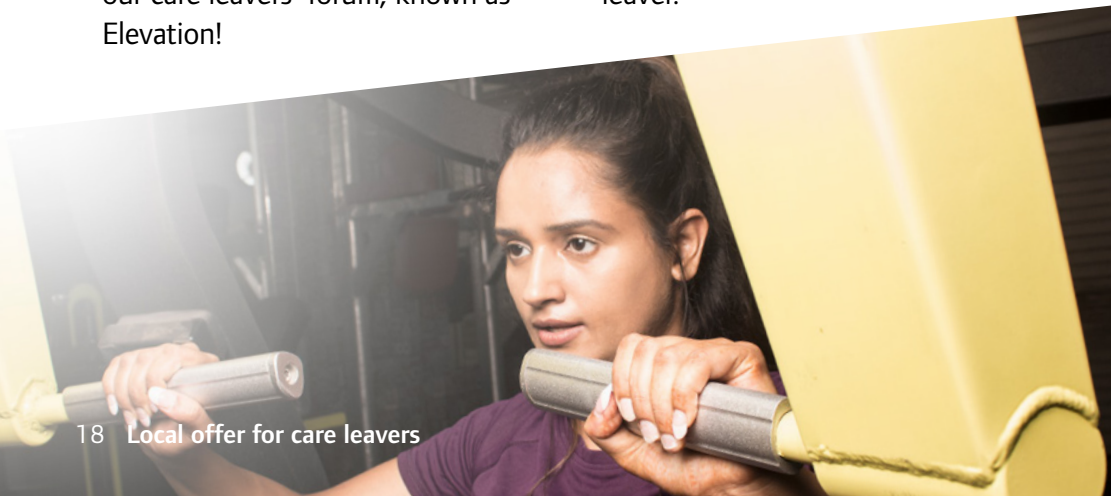
We will offer and support you:

- Provide free Leisure and Gym membership (to those residing in the London Borough of Lewisham and up to your 25th birthday).
- If you live outside the borough, we will pay a contribution towards a gym membership providing this is set out in your Pathway Plan.
- Give you information about groups and clubs you can join, including our care leavers' forum, known as Elevation!

- Invite you on trips to the theatre, sporting events and other activities.
- Give you opportunities to work for us as an interview panel member or staff trainer.
- Tell you about awards, schemes, and competitions you can enter that reflect your talents and interests.
- Help you enrol on the electoral register, so you can vote in elections.
- Offer work experience in the Council.
- Tell you about voluntary work opportunities.
- Tell you about leisure activities and possibly help finance them.
- Help you challenge any discrimination you face as a care leaver.

Becoming a parent

We can help you find support and guidance through pregnancy and after giving birth as a care leaver. There is support for mothers and fathers. Your PA can support you to attend doctor, initial midwife, and health visitor appointments. As well as this you can get child maternity grants and vouchers for when your baby is born. If you want to return to education, training or an apprenticeship, your PA can help you access costs for childcare. There are lots of other services and financial support you may be able to access. Please talk to your social worker, PA and the Leaving Care Nurse or your health professional.



Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

Lewisham employs many social workers and PAs with a lot of knowledge and experience of working with immigration and asylum issues. They will support you if you are waiting for a decision on your asylum claim to remain in the UK and can support you to plan for three possible outcomes after you turn 18. We will:

- Prepare you if you receive a form of indefinite leave to remain in the UK.
- Prepare you to return to your

country of origin if you are refused leave to remain in the UK at the end of the immigration consideration or decide to return yourself.

- Prepare you for a period of uncertainty if you remain in the UK without permanent leave

Your rights

You have a right to be involved in all decisions about your plans for leaving care. We respect your right to individuality, and we will not discriminate against you.

We want you to share your views and experiences to make sure we and others can meet your needs. You have a right to have your say if you are not happy about something. We will listen to you and tell you what you can do. Talk to someone who works closely with you, such as:

- social worker, PA, or their team manager
- foster carer or supervising social worker
- independent reviewing officer
- teacher or someone at school, college, university
- a work friend or your manager
- residential or supported accommodation key worker

Advocacy Support

You have a right to support from an independent advocate if you are thinking about challenging decisions about the care, we provide for you. Independent advocates can tell you about your rights and help you to be heard in meetings. They are separate from the Council, social workers, and your PA. If you feel as though you are struggling to express yourself, or your views are not being taken seriously, then you can approach an advocacy service to support you in making yourself heard. Although there are several advocacy services available, Lewisham works with National Advocacy Youth Service (NYAS) and you can access this service free of charge. We will always try to work together with an advocate where they are involved.

How can NYAS help you:

- If you feel your views are not being listened to and want someone on your side



- If you are unhappy with the way, you are being cared for or supported
- If you are angry or upset about something that is happening to you
- If you feel you haven't been treated fairly
- If no one is telling you what is happening about your situation
- If you haven't been involved in decisions that are being made about you
- To take part in meetings and reviews.

There may be some things that can't be changed, but an advocate will make sure everyone knows how you feel and help you to understand why certain decisions were made.

Your Information

You have a right to see the information Lewisham Council keeps about you, including your social care files and records written about you when you were in care. If you want to see your files, speak with your PA.

Other support

We will talk to you about other support you might need depending on your personal circumstances for example:

- You have special educational needs or a disability
- You are an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child or former unaccompanied asylum-seeking child and your immigration status is unclear
- You are in, or leaving custody; or you have had contact with the criminal justice system
- You are a young parent
- You are going through a difficult time in your personal life.

If you need any help and support, you can directly contact:

- Your PA (make sure you have their number saved)
- Your PAs manager
- The leaving care duty number 020 8314 8864
- Leaving Care Nurse (contact through your PA or the drop-in)
- Elevation (care leavers' forum) Participation Project Worker on 07901 784 489
mana.gondora@lewisham.gov.uk
- National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) Freephone helpline 0808 808 1001 or email help@nyas.net
- Shelter England.shelter.org.uk. Housing advice
- Become: freephone advice line for care leavers. Call 0800 023 2033, Monday to Friday, 10.30am–5pm, or visit www.becomecharity.org.uk
- Capstone Care Leavers Trust: provides grants for care leavers aged 17–25. Visit www.capstonecareleaverstrust.org

- Rees: The Care Leavers' Foundation: gives advice, and financial and community support. Visit www.reesfoundation.org
- Coram Voice coramvoice.org.uk/young-people-zone/are-you-care-leaver
- Children Commissioner childrencommissioner.gov.uk/get-advice/questions/what-my-rights-and-entitlements-are
- Sir William Boreman's Foundation provides grants to help people under 25 who live in Greenwich and Lewisham to access education. Visit www.thedrapers.co.uk
- Turn2us: helps people see what grants and benefits they can get. Visit www.turn2us.org.uk

Employment and education

- Drive Forward Foundation helps care leavers to get into work. Visit www.driveforwardfoundation.com
- Lewisham Virtual School: monitors and supports education. Visit www.lewishamvirtualschool.org.uk
- Princes Trust: provides support for jobs, training, and education. Visit www.princes-trust.org.uk

Finances

- Lewisham Credit Union: not-for profit financial cooperative which offers loans and savings. Visit www.lewishampluscu.co.uk
- The Money House: helps young people learn budgeting skills. Visit www.mybnk.org

Health

- My Health London: Visit www.myhealth.london.nhs.uk for information about NHS services.
- NHS 111: 24-hour urgent care phone line on 111 (in emergency call 999). Visit www.england.nhs.uk/urgent-emergency-care
- Mind: mental health charity which offers advice and support. Visit www.mind.org.uk
- Samaritans: call the free 24-hour helpline on 116 123. Visit www.samaritans.org
- Compass: help and advice on emotional wellbeing, sexual health or substance misuse. Visit www.compass-uk.org/lewisham
- Mind Kit: wellbeing and resilience sessions for young people. Visit www.mindkit.org.uk/lewisham
- kooth.com an online safe and anonymous service for support and counselling if you are not feeling your best

Parenting

- Visit www.lewishamcfc.org.uk to find children and family centres in the borough.
 - Find local events for families and children at www.lewisham.gov.uk
- Family Rights Group www.frg.org.uk

LGBTIQA+

- METRO: services to support young LGBTIQA+ people.
Visit www.metrocentreonline.org

Immigration

- Refugee Council: support for refugees. Call 020 7346 1134, email mytime@refugeecouncil.org.uk, or visit www.refugeecouncil.org.uk
- Migrant Children's Project: call 020 7636 8505, Tuesday to Thursday, 10am–12 noon, email mcpadvice@coramclc.org.uk
- or visit www.coram.org.uk
- Red Cross: support, advocacy, and family-finding service.
- Visit www.redcross.org.uk
- Afghanistan and Central Asian Association: 24 Deptford Broadway, Deptford SE8 4PA.
- Email info@acaa.org.uk,
- or visit www.acaa.org.uk



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Ref. 203-NY-1b