

Leaving Care Status - Relevant Children

I'm Zoon. I'm 17 and I was in care (I used to live with my foster carers) until I left college and moved into my own flat. I can't get job seekers allowance because Social Care are still responsible for me until I am 18. The good thing is that they have to pay my rent for the next year.

The law says that Social Care must help you in a number of ways to manage when you have left care.

They must:

- Keep in touch with you
- Make an assessment of your needs
- Prepare a pathway plan with you to say how they will support you in meeting your needs. This will include things about housing, money, education, health, keeping in touch with your family and any other needs. It must also say how they will pay for these things.
- Appoint you a personal adviser
- Find you somewhere suitable to live and pay your rent
- Give you money for your basic living needs such as food and bills and also for other things that you need
- Make sure that they listen to you and that you have a say in making decisions about your life

Some important stuff

Cash

You cannot claim benefits. Social Care must pay you. But if you are a lone parent or you are a young person with a disability or ill-health you can get benefits. The government expects Social Care to pay you enough money to meet the needs that have been agreed in your pathway plan. And you should never get less than you would have done on benefits. It is important to sort out with Social Care what they are paying for.

Rent

Social Care must find and pay for housing that is suitable for you. Housing Benefit is not available until you are 18 even if you are a lone parent or young person with a disability. If you are earning you may have to contribute towards your rent.

Social Care should pay your rent straight to the landlord and should also take care of the deposit and rent in advance.

In finding somewhere for you to live, Social Care must take into account your needs especially about your education or training and must also listen to what you want (although they can say if they think the place is too expensive). They must also check out that housing is not in a dangerous area. You may be able to stay with your foster carers or in your children's home. The government does not think that you should be expected to live on your own without support.

Setting up home grant

Social Care should also pay for furniture, fridge, cooker and other equipment that you need if you are setting up home independently. They'll have a written statement (policy) that will say what is reasonable and you should find out from this what help they can give you. They should always take into account your wishes but you may be expected to shop around and get some things second hand (although not things like your mattress - uughh!) Social Care may call this a leaving care grant.

Money for other things

Social Care will not be able to pay for everything but they should have a policy which shows the type of additional things that they will pay for. The government says these should include:

- Cost of thing you need for work - 'smart' or specialist clothes, fares to interviews and your place of work (at least until you get paid) and so on
- Help with special costs to do with your education or training such as equipment, college fees, field trips, fares, books etc.
- Counselling or therapy
- Leisure activities (this doesn't include raving!)
- Contact with your family and other important adults in your life.
- Emergencies
- Special needs

Glasses, Prescriptions, Dental Treatment etc

If you are at school or college you will get these free in the normal way. If you are not studying, you should check with your social worker or personal adviser what they will pay for. They will probably ask you to fill in a form called a HC1(SC) giving your name and address and details of your Social Care. You should then get a certificate lasting until your 18th birthday which means you will get free prescriptions, glasses and dental treatment. If you are a lone parent or a young person with disabilities you will get this help automatically because you are claiming benefits.

How is my money paid?

Social Care should help you open your own bank account and pay your money into this account every week. But you should tell them if you would rather be paid in cash or in some other way. For example, if you find it difficult to manage your money some of it could be paid straight to the gas or electric companies.

What if I am working or have savings?

Social Care should pay for the things that are in your pathway plan. If you are working they will take into account your wages in deciding what they should pay for. Their policy should say how they work this out and this should be fair and reasonable. They may, for example, expect you to pay something towards your rent and your basic living expenses. If you have savings, they will also take these into account in working out what they will pay. But they must **never** take into account any compensation you get from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority.

Can Social Care stop or change my money?

Social Care should not change your money without agreeing this with you when they review your pathway plan. They may wish to do this if:

- You start working
- You come into some money such as an inheritance
- They feel that you have not complied with aspects of your pathway plan that they have been paying for.

They can **never** stop the amount of money that you would have got on benefits.