# **Leaving Care Practice Guidance – Care Leavers 21 to 25.**

Practice Guidance for decision making “***Stepping Away and Stepping back”*** into the Leaving Care service between the ages of 21 to 25. This guidance is to be read in conjunction with the practice standards**.** The language used in the guidance and the context has been co-produced with our care experienced young adults.

**Legal Requirements**

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced 3 provisions: The below are in addition to existing provisions relating to support for care leavers. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 does not extend all **care leaver support to the age of 25**.

1. A duty on local authorities which requires them to offer Personal Advisors support to all care leavers towards whom the local authority had duties under section 23c of the Children Act 1989, up to age 25 - irrespective of whether they are engaged in education or training. This includes care leavers who return to the local authority at any point after the age of 21 up to age 25 and request such support.
2. A duty on local authorities to consult on and publish their **‘Local Offer’** for care leavers, which sets out care leavers legal entitlements and the additional discretionary support that the local authority provides.
3. A duty on local authorities which requires them to have regard to the seven ‘**Corporate parenting Principles’**, that will guide the way in which the local authority provides its services to children in care and care leavers.

**Needs Assessment for those aged 21 and up to 25.**

The government guidance [**Extending Personal Adviser Support to All Care Leavers to Age 25: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities (February 2018)**](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/extending-personal-adviser-support-to-age-25) highlights that the ultimate aim of leaving care is to support care leavers so they have a smooth transition and go onto live successful independent lives. Each care leaver will reach a different stage, some may need considerable continuing support with transition, whilst others will not take up the offer for continuing support. Therefore, there should be no assumption that the duty means that all care leavers will require statutory support until the age of 25. The duty means that local authorities do not need to provide the same level of support to care leavers age 21 – 25 as it does for those age 18-20. The duty does allow local authorities to respond to requests by care leavers age 21 to 25 who may need support to transition to independence and adult life; practical, emotional and financial until they at least 21 and if necessary until they are 25.

**For further information see: Needs assessment and Content of Pathway Plans for Relevant and Former Relevant Children (page 21) -** [Extending Personal Adviser support to all care leavers to age 25 (publishing.service.gov.uk)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a93ebb940f0b67aa5087986/Extending_Personal_Adviser_support_to_all_care_leavers_to_age_25.pdf)

**Pathway Planning for those Aged 21 and up to 25.**

The local authority is required to offer all care leavers a Personal Adviser up to the age 25 and apply the corporate parenting principles when continuing support is agreed or requested. However, the duty at this stage of a young adult's life is seen as different from the age 18 - 20 in that it enables the local authority to offer support to some individuals who may need continuing support in the transition process.

The level of support and intervention will vary considerably; many at this stage of their lives will not require, or want, ongoing help and will not have a Pathway Plan. Where care leavers require support with a single or specific issues, the pathway pan should be completed only in the relevant domains in the area they need support in. However, for others there may be multiple issues which will require a full pathway plan with regular in touches, planning, multi-agency working and meetings. Pa should apply professional judgement when deciding in the level of support that manager/supervisor agrees with.

**Review of Pathway Plans**

After the age of 21 and until the care leaver reaches 25 the issues that have been identified

including significant change in circumstances will determine how often the pathway plan will need to be reviewed however, as a **minimum this should be six monthly**.

**Expectations:**

It is expected that the level of support for care leavers will lessen over time. For care leavers over the age of 21 there is no proactive duty on the local authority to keep in touch with care leavers throughout the year however, the duty under the (Children and Social work Act 2017) requires local authorities to make care leavers aware that they can continue to request support by a Personal Advisor as soon as possible after they turn 21 and on an annual basis at a minimum. This is regardless of whether a care leaver may have at an earlier point declined the support of personal advisor support. The expectation is to remind the care leaver of their entitlement for Personal Advisor support if they need it through to age 25 – **Birthday card or celebration process (1) will be followed.**

For care leavers aged 21 and over the duties in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 is to assess care leaver needs and develop and keep the pathway plan under review. This duty should only be applied where the young person request support.

**Processes - Support Options age 21-25**

**We must offer the option to have support from a Personal Advisor up and until the young person’s 25th birthday and either provide it or not if this is their request.**

1. **Process to follow – Assessing changing in support after 21st birthday.**
2. **Process to follow - If the young adult requests Personal Adviser support to continue after they are 21, we must provide it**
3. **Process to follow - If the young adult does not want a Personal Adviser after their 21st birthday.** (If the young adult has said no to having a Personal Adviser, they can change their mind at any time up until their 25th birthday and can Step back into service and ask for Personal Adviser support.
4. **Process to follow - If the young adult has said yes to Personal Adviser support post 21.** They can also change their mind at any time and if they tell us that they do not want a Personal Adviser anymore, we must withdraw the support.
5. **If they choose to continue with Personal Adviser support, they will still need to have a Pathway Plan and are expected to participate in their plan.**
6. **Process – Discussing and assessing support between the ages of 21-25.**

* Six months before the young adults 21st birthday their Personal Advisor will talk to them about the possible changes in support after their 21st birthday. Pa to give a copy of and go through the Keeping In touch Information sheet (**Appendix 1**)
* A review / pathway plan to be completed no later than 2 weeks before their 21st birthday and will identify the support options post 21.
* Team manager/supervisor to add comments and rationale to the pathway plan and set SMART actions around the identified area of need and level of support post 21 including in touches. Al to be documented in case supervision on LCS.

1. **Process to follow - Young Person is Stepped into Service. Young adult requests Personal Adviser support to continue after they are 21. Note under regulations we must provide Personal Advisor support.**

* Pathway Planning post 21 to focus on the specific issues or difficulties that the young adult and Personal Adviser have identified together and will only need to cover the areas that the young adult and your Personal Adviser identify.
* The Pathway Plan will only need to be in place while they are receiving support (Stepped into service), and the young adult will have responsibilities to work with their Personal Adviser to carry out their parts of their agreed SMART plan.
* The Pathway Plan will need to be reviewed at a minimum of 6 months and at each review consider the support and any area of need for the next 6 months.
* Team manager/supervisor to add comments and rationale to the Pathway Plan and set SMART actions about agreed level of support for the next 6 months.
* The young adult must agree to work with their PA, and others supporting them and carry out parts of their plan.

**3. Process to follow – Young Adult Steps Away from Service**. **Young adult requests not to have a Personal Adviser after their 21st birthday.**

* PA and team manager/supervisor discuss in case supervision that the young adult wishes to step away from the service. The PA must complete a review and Pathway Plan no later than 3 months after the young adult asked to Step Away.
* The team manager /supervisor QA the Pathway Plan and if they agree the young adult can safely Step Away they are to add their comments and a LCS management oversight using the closure checklist and adds SMART timescales to complete.
* If it is agreed that the young adult can manage without the same levels of support they had when they were under 21, their Leaving Care Worker will celebrate their 21st birthday with them, give them their **step Away and Our Memories letter** **(Appendix 2&3)** which will explain contacting them annually, how they can Step Back into service, give details of the Hub, and record the young person’s current contact number, email and address on LCS. Pa to gain consent that the service will contact the young adult on their birthday if they celebrate this, or Christmas/other celebration of their choice and add a goodbye case note to LCS.
* PA to completed closure record on LCS and assign to team manager/supervisor who will add rationale and oversight of safely stepping away. **(Appendix 4)**
* Service lead/manager will read closure record, add an oversight to LCS detailing a clear rationale for Step Away or in the event that there is further discussion to take place with regards to the young adult’s choice to Step Away from the service.
* Team manager/ supervisor to add details of young adult to Step Away log and add the young persons key date to the leaving care calendar and CC in allocated worker at that time.

**3.1: Birthday Cards and Christmas / celebrations**

As part of the Step Away process and where the young adult has given consent, we will send them an annual birthday/Christmas/celebration card.

**3.2: Team manager/Supervisor to follow this process**

* When the team manager/supervisor authorises, the closure record they are to enter the young adults Key date (Birthday/celebration of choice) and CC their allocated PA at that time in the leaving care calendar.

**3.3: The PA last allocated or the duty PA should:**

* PA /duty should check the leaving care calendar each morning to check if there are any young people who should be sent a birthday/Christmas card and action the below.
* contact the young person on their last recorded contact number, email address and try to talk to them to establish what they would like – a physical or ecard.
* re-establish consent to continue to send birthday/Christmas/Celebration cards and signpost them to the BwD Offer online and Hub.
* Where we attempt to make contact with a young person, and we are not successful we record this.

**2.4: Boulevard Hub**

A duty PA attends the Boulevard Hub every Wednesday alongside the care leavers specialist nurses and REVIVE psychology team. It is important to us that the young adult keep stable relationships, so their last worker can become their point of contact in the service even when they Step Away. They can update us of their lives and if they need to see/speak to their previous PA they will be told at the point of Step Away that they can access the hub any week to. We take a family approach in the service, and should the PA not be available, another PA will support and where possible this will be a PA who the young adult has a relationship with.

**2.5: Step Away request where there are unmet needs of concerns**

* Former Relevant young people aged 21-25 may request to be 'Stepped Away' to universal, specialist or Adult Social Care. Where there is concern about significant unmet needs or safeguarding concerns a meeting with the Senior Manager of the Leaving Care team will be held to carefully consider the young person's request. If there are other professionals involved this is to be multi agency.
* Service manager/head of service will add an oversight about rationale.
* Where there is concern that a Former Relevant young person aged 21-25 might not have mental capacity to make this decision, a Mental Capacity Assessment under the remit of the Mental Capacity Act 2005 may be undertaken. Should the outcome of this assessment be that the young person lacks capacity to make this decision, a Best Interest Meeting may be arranged to make a multi-agency Best Interest decision to either offer continued leaving care services or 'Step Away' to Adult Social Care and specialist services. Where the decision of the Best Interest meeting is disputed
* the matter is escalated to the Senior Manager for care planning.
* If support is 'Stepped Away' a letter will be sent to the young person from the allocated worker to confirm and note their future entitlements of support, and how to get back in touch in the future and access leaving care services again, if they wish to or their circumstances change.
* A copy of the Step away letter will be shared with professionals from universal, specialist and Adult Social Care Services who continue to support the young person, if the young person consents to this.

**3.0: Process to follow - Young adult Steps back into Service. Young adult has requested support from a Personal Advisor up to the age of 25. Should the young adult need additional support between 21-24, they can at any time Step back into service even if they had previously ceased receiving support when they reached age 21.**

* The PA/duty must record the request by the young for support and to Step Back into service.
* PA/duty speak to team manager/supervisor who will be proportionate and take into account the type of support that the young adult is requesting and decide if this is a signposting to universal services or the allocation of a PA.
* If the young adult is Stepping Back into service, then referral record to be completed by PA/duty.
* Team manager/supervisor to allocate PA, if possible previous PA before the young person Stepped away from service. Manager/supervisor to add a management oversight on LCS setting out SMART tasks for the PA. This must include the level of in touches and timescale of work.
* The review and pathway plan must be complete at a max of three months from the date of the young adult requesting to Step Back into service.
* Where a young adult is otherwise living a successful independent life, but requires support on a single issue, a full needs assessment may not be necessary. Pa to discuss with Team manager/ supervisor what levels of needs assessment is appropriate (single or full assessment) who will document on a management oversight.
* Where a PA has concerns that care leavers may require support on a broader range of issues than they initially reported, carrying out a full needs assessment may help to identify any additional needs and to be agreed in supervision with team manager/supervisor will document on a management oversight.
  + - * Pa to consider at every contact we have with the young adult the level of support they may need including general advice and guidance or more in-depth support for a period of time. This will include a Pathway Plan if they agree.
      * The PA should provide support for as long as that issue remains and address any new issues if they arise. If the young adult does not want or require support on an ongoing basis the ***Step Away from service*** process to be followed
      * **Note:** the level of support may increase, and the manager/supervisor will case note the levels.

1. **Keep In Touch Higher Education - 21-24**

If the young adult is in Higher Education (HE), such as University, we will be more involved with them until they finish your course. It is important that our care leavers succeed in their studies, and we would want to know if they are struggling, so that we could help to resolve any issues with them. We will not Step Away care leavers in Higher Education.

**Process:**

* + - * Care Leaver remains **Stepped in** to the leaving care service until they completed their course.
      * Pa and care leaver are to agree a frequency of contact throughout the year and manager/supervisor to agree this: usually KIT 4 times per year.
      * Review and Pathway Plan to be completed at a minimum of every 6 months until they finish their studies.
      * Higher Education link worker to be part of the review and Pathway Plan unless the young adult has not given consent then an update is gained and added to the plan.

1. **Keeping in touch – 21-25**

Although there is no requirement to proactively keep in touch with all young people aged 21 to 25 throughout the year, there is a duty which requires local authorities to make care leavers aware that they can continue to request Personal Adviser support when the person turns 21, and on at least an annual basis thereafter.

**Process:**

* Support only needs to be provided where requested by the young adult who will be KIT and in touches will be completed at a min of 4 times per year.
* The means of keeping in touch may vary and can be through email, text, or other social media applications. However, such methods of keeping in touch should not be adopted as standard practice in every case. The method of communication should be decided in light of the care leaver’s needs and agreed with team manager/supervisor.
* If there are concerns, then the team manager/supervisor to discuss with the PA and add a management oversight stating increased in touches and include in case supervision.
* The level of contact between the PA and the young person to support around the area of need should be written into their Pathway Plan, in touch template and case summary.
* Case supervision will be held every 3 months or more if required.

**Appendix 1 – In touch 21-25 Information Sheet -** ****

**Appendix 1 – Stepping Away Letter -** ****

**Appendix 2 – Memories Letter - **

**Appendix 3 – Step Away closure checklist -** 

**Legislation, Statutory Guidance and Government Non-Statutory Guidance**

1. Click here to view: Needs Assessment and Content of Pathway Plans for Relevant and Former Relevant Children: <https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/397649/CA1989_Transitions_guidance.pdf#page=21>.
2. Click here to view: Extending PA support to all care leavers to age 25 (DFE 2018)

[Extending Personal Adviser support to all care leavers to age 25 (publishing.service.gov.uk)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a93ebb940f0b67aa5087986/Extending_Personal_Adviser_support_to_all_care_leavers_to_age_25.pdf)

1. Click here to view Children Act 1989; transition to adulthood for care leavers.

[Children Act 1989: transition to adulthood for care leavers - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-act-1989-transition-to-adulthood-for-care-leavers)

1. Children and Social Work Act 2017

[Children and Social Work Act 2017 (legislation.gov.uk)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/16/contents)