Helping homeless young people

A simple guide to being looked after by Luton Borough Council.

Helping homeless young people know what being looked after means and helping them make informed choices.

www.luton.gov.uk
You may already have been provided with Crash Pad accommodation or be staying with friends. While your needs are being assessed by Luton 16+ Team, you may be provided with emergency temporary accommodation if necessary. Luton 16+ Team will help you to claim benefits throughout the duration of completing the assessment.

What will happen in my assessment?

You have been referred, or you have referred yourself, to Luton 16+ Team because you are either homeless or at risk of being homeless. A Luton 16+ social worker will meet with you to ask you questions about your current situation. These might include:

- how your situation has occurred
- why you feel you can no longer live at home
- where you have been staying
- who has been caring for you.

The social worker will also speak with your parent(s) or carer(s) for their views on the difficulties that have come about, and see what can be done to support you to live at home if at all possible.

The social worker will also speak with other professionals who know you, such as your doctor, school or anyone else who is currently helping you.

It is important for you to know that the Luton 16+ Team has a duty to help young people to be able to live at home with their families. Even if we start looking after you, we will help you to keep in touch with your family if this is appropriate and positive. We will work with you and your family to try to make it possible for you to live at home again.

Once the assessment is complete, Luton 16+ Team will decide whether to ‘accommodate’ you. This means that you would be looked after by Luton Borough Council, therefore meaning that you are provided with care, support and a place to live.
What will happen if I say no?
The local authority children’s service has a duty to accommodate children in their areas who are in need of accommodation (when certain conditions apply). You cannot be forced to be looked after, but if you refuse you may have to make your own arrangements. You must always get legal advice if you are thinking of turning down local authority accommodation – you should contact N.Y.A.S or Voice for informal advice, or the Citizen’s Advice Bureau for information about getting legal advice. You could ask for your local housing department for help with housing, but they might decide that you are not actually homeless as you have been offered accommodation by Luton 16+ Team. The housing department is also prevented from housing children when they should be accommodated by Luton 16+ Team.

Do I have a choice about being looked after?
Yes you do. An offer for you to be looked after will only be made if there is no other suitable way of meeting all your needs. It is very important that you understand what being looked after means, so that you can make an informed choice. The information in this leaflet will help you with this decision.

Section 17 support
In the event that the assessment concludes that the young person needs can be met without the need for Section 20 accommodation under The Children Act 1989 (T.C.A), support may then be offered under Section 17 of T.C.A 1989 subject to the outcome of the assessment. This support will include the young person having an allocated worker from the 16+ Team and a plan of support which will be a child in need plan. This plan will be completed with the young person in order to offer on-going support and the plan will be reviewed after three months.

The officer responsible for the support will be the 16+ housing officer. With regards to appropriate accommodation the 16+ Team may make referral to the local hostels / accommodation providers and may also explore private providers in order to signpost the young person into appropriate suitable accommodation.

Being Looked After: what does being looked after mean?
All children and young people in care, both those with care orders and those being accommodated on a voluntary basis, are referred to by social workers as being looked after. You might have heard other people refer to this as being “in care”.

What if I say no?
**What is a placement?**
This is the place where you will be living when you are looked after. The type of placement you will live in depends on both your age and your needs, including the need for you to have contact with family members and or live close to where you are working or attending college/training. We will listen to your views when looking for a placement, but the most suitable placement for you is not always in your first choice of location. Your social worker will introduce you to your new placement and help you settle in.

**The placement could be:**
- with a foster carer
- with a supported lodgings carer
- in a residential home or a hostel
- an individual semi-independent placement in a rented property, with support on a daily or weekly basis.

To begin with, you may live somewhere with lots of day-to-day support. In time you may move to a different type of placement with a lower level of support. Placements work best if there are clear ground rules and everybody sticks to them – just like in any household or family. The ground rules can vary depending on the placement; however, the majority will cover the basic rules such as: meals, helping out, coming-in times, keys etc. If things are not going well for you in your placement, it is important to talk with your leaving care personal advisor, who will be able to assist and sort out any problems with you.
Preparation for adulthood
(Leaving care)
The Luton 16+ Team supports young people who are looked after and preparing to leave care, or who have left care and are living independently, to help them gain the confidence and skills to make the most of their opportunities.

Leaving care doesn’t happen suddenly, it is a gradual process which prepares the young person for the move to independent living and adulthood. Luton 16+ Team must help young people prepare for leaving care by:

• assessing your leaving care needs
• developing pathway plans
• providing a leaving care personal advisor
• helping with somewhere to live, education, training, employment, and offering financial support
• keeping in contact.

Who is entitled to leaving care support?
Leaving care support is provided to the following:

• Eligible young people: young people who have been in care for 13 weeks from the age of 14, who are currently still in care and are aged between 16-17
• Relevant young people: young people who have left care and are aged between 16 and 17 years old and who were previously eligible
• Former relevant young people: young people aged between 18-21, or 24 years old if they had started a designated education course before the age of 21, and were previously either eligible and or relevant.

Qualifying young people
Young people that are entitled to advice, assistance and guidance are those aged 16-21 who were looked after for less than 13 weeks (after their 14th birthday), but more than 24 hours after the age of 16. This includes respite care, special guardianships orders, young people who have returned home (previously section 20) for more than six months and young people who have been living at home for more than six months and whose section 31 care order is discharged.

What will happen if later on I decide I don’t want to be looked after?
If you have been looked after for more than 13 weeks, and you are no longer looked after, you are still entitled to leaving care support as a ‘Relevant Child’. This means that Children’s Services will still be responsible for your support. Your social worker will keep in touch and work with you on your plans. If you were looked after for less than 13 weeks, you are still entitled to advice and assistance as a ‘Qualifying Child’.
16+ Assessment of need
As a young person looked after and moving towards adulthood, you will be expected to meet with your leaving care personal advisor several times to ensure they can find our your exact needs. This is called a 16+ assessment of need. If you started to be looked after a later date, then the assessment will be carried out then.

These meetings will help your leaving care personal advisor to understand, not only you and your current situation, but also to work out your pathway plans ensuring things are correct for you. You will always be involved in the planning process and have the chance to put across your point of view, alongside the views of your parents and family.

During your 16+ assessment of need, you may want to ask your leaving care personal advisor some questions, such as:

• Can I stay in care until I am 18 if I feel I’m not ready to live on my own?
• What types of accommodation are available at 17 and 18?
• Who will be involved in my 16+ assessment?
• What financial support is available if I want to study or A Levels and if I go to college or university?
• How often will I see my leaving care personal advisor?
• Will I continue to see them after I am 18?

When your 16+ assessment of need is complete and you are happy with it, a meeting will take place with your leaving care personal advisor to convert this assessment into your pathway plan. If you are unhappy with any part of your assessment, a meeting will take place with your personal advisor and a manager to try to find a solution. If you are still unhappy, then you can make a formal complaint. Your leaving care personal advisor should give you a leaflet on how to do this.

How will I be supported?
A leaving care personal advisor from the Independence Support Service (ISS) will work with you and help to support you. They will also help you to prepare for leaving care by working on your pathway plan with you and helping you to achieve the tasks recorded in it.

You will be expected to meet with your personal advisor regularly, and you can keep in touch by phone or text. They will visit you once a month, or more if necessary or needed. Your leaving care personal advisor will help you to register with your local housing department for somewhere to live when you turn 18, and when the times comes they will also help you plan your move into independent accommodation.

After the age of 18, you will be expected to support yourself financially through working or the benefits system. ISS will continue to support you as a care leaver up to your 21st birthday, or longer if you are in higher education by this time.
Pathway plan
A pathway plan is a written plan, which lists all the arrangements that are being made to meet your needs both in care and leaving care. The plan will list your views and goals for your future. It covers:

- where you will live
- education, training and employment (and career plans)
- your family and friends
- practical skills
- health
- identity
- financial and personal support
- any other support you might need.

The plan will be checked and reviewed either every six months or whenever your situation changes. You should be given a copy of your pathway plan, if you do not receive one then ask your personal advisor.

Review meeting
This is a meeting that takes place at least every six months to look at how things are going for you, how you are progressing and also to agree for any changes to your pathway plan. It is highly important that you attend this meeting with your leaving care personal advisor and give your views. Your parents will also be invited to the review meeting. In some cases, the young person and the parent come to separate parts of the meeting, this is due to the fact that in some situations this is the best way to get everyone’s view onto the plan.

The reviews are held by an independent reviewing officer, who will be happy to meet with you beforehand to help you to understand what to expect at the meeting, tell you who will be attending and find out what important things you would like mentioned during the meeting. This person will ensure your views are heard.

Despite the review meetings ending when you reach 18, the pathway plans will continue to be checked and reviewed with you every six months. It will state what support you need as your situation changes and also what plans will need to be put into place for the future.
Useful contact details

Department for Work and Pensions
To apply for most social security benefits and for advice, contact the appropriate social security office for your area, or speak to your Connexions or 16+ worker for help.

Voice
An independent organisation that provides support and advocacy to young people in care and offers a representative to young people in secure accommodation.

- Telephone: 0808 800 5792
- Email: help@voiceyp.org
- Website: www.voiceyp.org

A National Voice
An organisation for young people in care and those who have left care.

- Telephone: 0161 953 4011
- Email: office@anv.u-net.com

Who Cares? Trust
An organisation that works to improve public care for children and young people.

- Telephone: 020 7251 3117
- Email: mailbox@thewhocarestrust.org.uk
- Website: www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk

Who Cares? Linkline (run by the Who Cares? Trust)
A telephone helpline offering confidential help and advice to anyone in care at present or in the past. Open Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays 3.30pm-6pm. Freephone: 0500 564570

NHS Direct
Provides a 24-hour nurse-led confidential helpline

- Telephone: 0845 46 47
- Samaritans: If you need to talk in confidence, contact the helpline Telephone: 08457 909090

Citizen’s Advice Bureau
For information about getting legal advice.

- Telephone: 020 7833 2181
- Website: www.citizensad