

Helping homeless young people

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Version: 2.0 (published)

Last updated: 18 August 2020

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A simple guide to being looked after by Luton Council. Helping homeless young people know what being looked after means and helping them make informed choices.

A guide to being looked after by Luton Children's Services

You may already have been provided with Crash Pad accommodation or be staying with friends. While your needs are being assessed by the Assessment team, you may be provided with emergency temporary accommodation if necessary. The Assessment 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 the Luton Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub team (MASH) because you are either homeless or at risk of being homeless. The MASH team will arrange for a social worker/housing officer to meet with you and 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 Assessment 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; the Assessment team will decide whether to 'accommodate' you. This means that you would be looked after by Luton Council, therefore meaning that you are provided with care, support and a place to live.

Section 17 support

In the event that the assessment concludes that your 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 you having an allocated worker from one of the Family Safeguarding teams and a plan of support which will be a child in need plan. This plan will be completed with you in order to offer on-going support and the plan will be reviewed after three months.

The housing officer will work alongside the social worker in terms of providing support. With regards to appropriate accommodation the Assessment team may make a referral to the local hostels accommodation providers and may also explore private providers in order to signpost you into appropriate suitable accommodation.

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 document will help you with this decision.

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.

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 happens once I become looked after?

Children's Services will find somewhere suitable for you to live and give you financial, practical and emotional support.

As well as receiving support from your carer or the support staff in the place you will be living, you will also have a social worker who will get to know you and work with you in order to plan how to meet your needs. In addition to this, you will be supported in education, training, or employment so that you have the best opportunities to reach your potential.

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.

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'.

Preparation for adulthood (Leaving care)

The Family Safeguarding teams and the Looked After Children's teams supports young people who are looked after and preparing to leave care, to help them gain the confidence and skills to make the most of their opportunities.

The Leaving Care team support young people aged 18 to 25 who have been looked after and are now Former Relevant Leaving care doesn't happen suddenly, it is a gradual process which prepares the young person for the move to independent living and adulthood. The Social Care teams 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 to 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 to 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 to 25 who were looked after for less than 13 weeks (after their fourteenth 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.

How will I be supported?

A leaving care personal advisor from Social Care 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 your goals.

You will be expected to meet with your 18+ team personal advisor regularly, and you can keep in touch by phone or text. They will visit you at least every eight weeks, 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.

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

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 twenty-fifth birthday.

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.

Looked after children 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.

Coram Voice

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

You can contact Coram Voice on the following details:

- 0808 800 5792
- [Coram Voice email](#)
- [Coram Voice website](#)

A National Voice (Coram Voice)

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

You can contact A National Voice on the following details:

- 0161 953 4011
- [A National Voice email](#)
- [A National Voice website](#)

Become

An organisation that works to improve public care for children and young people.

You can contact Become on the following details:

- 0800 023 2033
- [Become email](#)
- [Become website](#)

Become Charity is a telephone helpline offering confidential help and advice to anyone in care at present or in the past. It is open Monday to Friday from 10.30am to 3pm.

The Samaritans Luton

If you need to talk in confidence, contact the helpline on 116 123 (free from any phone) or on 0300 094 5717 (local call charges apply).

Citizen's Advice Bureau Luton

For information about getting legal advice, contact the Citizen's Advice Bureau on 0344 245 1285.