

# Towards a London-wide Local Care Offer

## Summary

Through the Children and Social Work Act 2017, the Government introduced the requirement for local authorities to publish a 'local offer for care leavers' which outlines the services available within the local authority area to support care leavers as they start to live independently. However, with 33 local authorities in London, each with a different offer of support, it can often be challenging to understand and access the help that is available to care leavers.

The way in which 'local offers' are published and displayed to care leavers varies widely from borough to borough, with some spelling out in detail the financial support available to care leavers in easily accessible language, and others failing to display the document on the website at all.

Furthermore, the level of support given to care leavers also varies between local authorities in London, including priority access to social housing, free travel, council tax exemptions, emergency financial support, and subsidised access to leisure.

This lack of a consistent offer adds to the confusion which many care leavers feel around what support is available to them as they start to live independently for the first time.

The Mayor of London, through signing up to the 'Care Leavers Covenant' has attempted to improve the London-wide offer for care leavers. He has also waived the GLA precept charge for boroughs that exempt care leavers from paying council tax.

The Children's Society, Become, and the London Children in Care Network believe more can be done to improve the consistency of support available to care leavers across London, in which local and devolved government in London should come together to agree to a pan-London minimum standard offer for care leavers.

**Partnership  
for Young  
London**

**The  
Children's  
Society**

**BECOME.**  
THE CHARITY FOR CHILDREN IN CARE  
AND YOUNG CARE LEAVERS

**The Children's Society** is a national charity committed to improving the lives of young people in this country. We work to transform the hopes and happiness of young people who are facing abuse, exploitation, and neglect. We support them through their most serious life challenges, and campaign tirelessly for the big social changes that will make life better for those who need hope most. We've been doing this for 140 years and we won't stop until we've built a society where hope is alive in every child.

**The London Children in Care Network** is part of the Partnership for Young London and is a group designed for and comprised by care experienced young people from across London. The aim is for care experienced young people to be upskilled and provided with opportunities to ensure pathways to progression, as well as being empowered to influence policy.

**Become** is the charity for children in care and young care leavers. Our mission is to help children in care and young care leavers to believe in themselves and to heal, grow, and unleash their potential. We work alongside them to make the care system the best it can be.

## Introduction

The Children's Society have a proud history of campaigning to improve the support available to care leavers as they make the transition to adulthood. Our 'Fairer Start for Care Leavers' campaign has seen the introduction of council tax exemptions in 130 upper tier authorities. This means that when these young people start to live independently, they aren't faced with large bills and have the time to get a job, start managing their money, and build a future filled with hope. Working alongside partners, we also successfully campaigned for care leavers to be exempted from the Shared Accommodation Rate up until the age of 25, helping them to maintain their tenancies during the first years of independent life.

We also support care leavers directly through many of our services; for example, in London, our Bright Light programme – delivered in partnership with Catch 22 – supports care leavers aged 16-26 into apprenticeships, employment, education and training, whilst helping them to build confidence, overcome barriers and realise their potential.

Across London, we estimate that there are 15,270<sup>1</sup> care leavers aged 18-25. Like all young adults in London, they will find themselves moving around the city to be closer to opportunities, love, friendships, or to live somewhere more suited to their preferences. Yet as they balance moving across borough boundaries with transitioning to adulthood, numerous challenges arise. Once they move out of the authority they grew up in, they will almost immediately face a drop-off in support available to them, ranging from no longer being a priority on the housing register, to receiving no help with their council tax bill.

Care leavers have every right to move across the city and live a normal and healthy life, without facing significant barriers.

This briefing explores the different levels of support on offer in all 33 London Boroughs, areas of best practice for care leavers, and makes recommendations to enable better co-ordination to deliver a common 'core offer' for care leavers across the city.

## Methodology

The briefing was produced through a desk-based comparison of all 33 local offer documents across London as published today. It examines the services explicitly detailed in the local offers across: the accessibility of the offer; the levels of financial support on offer; help with accommodation; the provisions for the development of education and skills; and health and well-being services. Therefore, in practice whilst local authorities may offer services not

---

<sup>1</sup> The Children's Society's own estimates, a full explanation of our methodology can be requested.

detailed in this briefing, if it isn't included in their local offer it doesn't form part of the comparison.

## London Local Care Offers

Local authorities have a corporate parenting responsibility to support young people leaving care up until the age of 25. This support includes practical, social, and emotional support that any parent would give their child, from assistance finding accommodation, to helping them secure stable employment.

Councils have a number of statutory responsibilities for children who were in their care, until they are 21, or 25 if they are still in education or training, have a disability, or if the care leaver requests continued support. For example, care leavers aged 16-18 are entitled to financial support to meet their education, training, and employment needs, with those aged 18-21 entitled to a £1,200 bursary if they stay in full-time education, or a £2000 bursary if they go to university.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 extended support for care leavers, by clarifying in law the role of local authorities as corporate parents, giving care leavers access to their personal advisers until the age of 25, and legislating for the publication of local offers<sup>2</sup> to ensure that every care leaver knows what help and support is available to them locally.

In the local offer, the authority should include all services offered by the council which support care leavers in, or preparing for, independent living. This includes services that the authority is legally obligated to provide to care leavers such as 'staying put arrangements', and discretionary services the council provides, such as travel subsidies. Often, however, there is little distinction made in local offers between the support councils are statutorily obligated to provide and the discretionary services provided to support care leavers.

With 33 local authorities in London, each local offer will provide a different level of support, which can be challenging for care leavers to understand and access the help that is available to them. This is particularly an issue if care leavers are placed in accommodation, or choose to move for work or study, outside of the area in which they were originally in care.

Following campaigning by The Children's Society, 29 of London's 33 local authorities now have some form of policy in place to exempt care leavers from the burden of paying council tax. The Mayor of London has also supported the campaign, by agreeing to waive the Greater London Authority (GLA) precept when a borough has put in place a scheme for care leavers to be exempt from council tax.

Furthermore, the Mayor has attempted to improve the London-wide offer for care leavers, firstly by signing up to the 'Care Leaver Covenant' and committing in his 2021 manifesto to giving care leavers half price travel on TfL services. This is something we wholeheartedly support and look forward to working with the Mayor to implement it. The GLA has also established the London Local Authority Care Leavers Network – bringing together London's local government to explore how support for care experienced young people can be better coordinated and improved.

---

<sup>2</sup> Whilst Local Authorities and Combined Authorities have corporate parenting responsibilities, and therefore an obligation to publish a local offer for care leavers, the Greater London Authority has no such responsibilities, which complicates attempts to create a city-wide offer.

Councils across London have a deep history and culture of working in collaboration to make life better for children and young people across the city. We believe this can be used to create a more integrated offer for care leavers across London, so that wherever care leavers were looked after, they know they will be given a minimum standard of support.

## Displaying Local Offers

There is currently no central hub which details all of the different local offers in London. Each of the 33 local authorities across London have different ways of publishing and explaining their 'local offer' to care leavers.

Nearly all local authorities in London display their local offer on their website, though there is no standard format across the different councils. For example, 26 of the 33 local authorities in London display a PDF of their local offer on a clearly accessible section of their website, 4 have a dedicated website detailing their local offer, with 3 not clearly signposting to their offer on their website.

The vast majority of young people who contact Become's Care Advice Line have never heard of their local offer, and don't know where or how to access it. Very few have been informed about the local offer document by professionals in their lives. You can't access something if you don't know about it, and this lack of awareness of rights and entitlements creates and intensifies a number of challenges for care leavers.

This lack of a central hub, coupled with differing practices for the publication of 'local offers' across London may be confusing to care leavers, especially if they have to move between boroughs as they start living independently. Local authorities must do more to ensure all care leavers (and the people who support them) are aware of their local offer, where to find it, and how to push for changes which strengthen the offer.

There are some councils which should be commended for displaying their local offer in an innovative and accessible way. Hackney, for example, details the support care leavers are entitled to via a comic strip and Merton spells out their local offer through 32 simple pledges they make to care leavers.

Croydon is also one of the few councils who provides their offer in multiple languages. This is especially important in London; in 2020 there were 1,770<sup>3</sup> unaccompanied asylum-seeking children looked after by local authorities across Greater London, many of whose first language may not be English. Become publishes their factsheets in Arabic, Kurdish, Pashto, Tigrinya, Vietnamese and Albanian to ensure young people understand their rights and entitlements.

Finally, within each local offer, we have identified a range of different practices outlining the specific level of financial support care leavers are entitled to. Whilst some councils set out in detail the level of financial support care leavers should expect – such as Haringey – others fail to clearly outline what care leavers can access, or how they can make claims for different entitlements.

Local authorities will always want to present their offer in different ways, in some cases designing documents in partnership with care leavers in their area. However, as part of the development of a wider pan-London offer, the GLA should establish and maintain a care leavers hub on its website, compiling all of the local offer documents alongside any other

---

<sup>3</sup> Department for Education, 2021. *Children looked after in England including adoptions*. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions/2020>

entitlements across the city. This would create a “one stop shop” for care leavers to find out about their entitlements, regardless of their local authority.

### Examples of best practice

Local Authority	Details
Croydon	Provide their local offer in multiple languages on an easy to access webpage.
Hackney	Has a comic strip detailing the support care leavers are entitled to from the council in their local offer.
Lambeth, Haringey	Spells out financial support clearly.

## Financial Support

Our research<sup>4</sup> has found that care experienced young people are a particularly vulnerable group when it comes to managing their finances, especially as they often begin to manage their budget fully for the first time when they move into independent accommodation.

Across London, care leavers will experience different levels of financial support depending on their ‘parent authority’. An overview of some of the main areas of support on offer are summarised below:

### Council tax exemptions

Young people leaving the care system are at a high risk of falling into council tax debt. Our *Wolf at the Door*<sup>5</sup> report into council tax debt showed that the pace of escalation of debt by local authorities could be frightening for care leavers.

Through our campaign ‘A fairer start for care leavers’, The Children’s Society has been asking councils to use their powers under section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 to exempt care leavers from the burden of paying council tax until the age of 25. In doing so, local authorities can prevent a group of young people who are financially vulnerable from falling into debt and meet their responsibilities as corporate parents. 29 of London’s 33 local authorities have some form of policy in place to exempt care leavers from the burden of paying council tax.

The Mayor of London has also supported this campaign by agreeing to waive the GLA precept when a borough has put in place a discretionary scheme for care leavers to be exempt from council tax.

However, London’s local authorities have decided to exempt care leavers in different ways. This means that care leavers placed in accommodation in another borough, or who move across the city, often aren’t able to benefit from council tax exemptions.

Some emerging issues have been reported to The Children’s Society in the ways in which London Boroughs are implementing council tax exemptions. For example, some local authorities are providing exemption to all care leavers living in their jurisdiction and some are

<sup>4</sup> The Children’s Society, 2017. *Claiming after care. Care leavers and the benefits system.*

<sup>5</sup> The Children’s Society, 2015. *The Wolf at the Door. How Council Debt Collection is harming children.*

not, meaning that a young care leaver who moves away might suddenly face the prospect of paying council tax when they were previously exempt from doing so.

Another issue we have identified is that some local authorities have adopted a means tested exemption for care leavers. Whilst good intentioned, a means-test still means that a care leaver must apply for the exemption and prove their eligibility for it. Our previous research into care leavers receiving and challenging benefit sanctions has shown that only 16.6% of care leavers challenge their sanctions compared to 24% of the general population<sup>6</sup>.

Become have also found that even when some local authorities do offer council tax exemptions for care leavers, this isn't always applied automatically and requires the young person to be aware of this entitlement and contact their local authority to ensure it is applied.

In our view, all policies to exempt care leavers from council tax would benefit from being simplified, with care leavers being fully exempt from paying council tax, up until the age of 25 years. This exemption should apply to all care leavers whether they were in the care of the authority they live now or not. Furthermore, any exemption should be automatically applied to prevent care leavers being unfairly penalised for not being aware of their right to an exemption or how to action it.

## Emergency Support and Benefits

As stated above, care experienced young people are uniquely vulnerable to financial pressures. Without the financial stability provided to the majority of young people by their parents, care leavers are much more likely to rely on support from the social security system. This will mean that most will submit a benefit claim around their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Most councils signal that they provide guidance towards making claims in their local offer.

However, there are often long waits between applying for social security and receiving it. Therefore, some councils in London provide discretionary loans or grants to care leavers waiting for their first benefits payment. This practice varies widely from council to council. Greenwich, for example, will pay care leavers £50 a week for up to eight weeks whilst they wait for their benefits payment. Others provide loans, the balance of which is either paid off by the care leaver or deducted from their future financial entitlements.

In times of financial emergency, many councils in London will provide similar loans or grants to care leavers in order to lessen their economic burden. However, 10 councils in London fail to detail the support they offer for care leavers in such situations, and a further 14 offer only vague promises of discretionary support in exceptional circumstances, signposting a care leavers Personal Advisor as the place to go to ask for support.

Having examined Local Welfare Assistance Scheme Policies for all London Councils, some of the 10 councils who fail to detail emergency support available to care leavers, make clear in their policies that care leavers are a priority group for financial support. This lack of cross referencing can lead to care leavers facing financial hardship being unaware about the services available to them, having instead to rely on their Personal Advisor knowing about it. Councils should be more explicit in stating the level of emergency financial support they offer for care leavers, cross referencing with their Local Welfare Assistance Scheme, if applicable.

Furthermore, the offering of loans to assist in times of financial crisis or whilst care leavers wait for welfare payments, has also been identified as a practice in some local authorities in London. Whilst these loans can grant short term relief to difficult financial situations, they may

---

<sup>6</sup> The Children's Society, 2017. *Claiming after care*.

make budgeting more difficult for care leavers in the future and lead to unnecessary stress and anxiety.

We believe that to reduce the risk of care leavers taking on further debt, care leavers should receive grants instead from their local council when they face financial difficulties.

Any financial information should also be clearly detailed in an accessible way in the local offer, rather than being represented in an additional financial policy document, which can often be confusing to the reader.

### Examples of best practice

Local Authority	Detail
Barnet	Will provide 4-week subsistence loan to assist with benefits wait.
Greenwich	Provide £50 a week until benefits come in for up to 8 weeks.
Hammersmith and Fulham	Provide advance on Universal Credit up to 6 weeks whilst waiting for benefits.

### Help setting up bank accounts, identification, and support with savings

Often, for young people leaving care, the first time they receive advice about managing their finances are once they have already fallen into debt and financial difficulty. This is compounded by the fact that they will experience a variety of different financial advice depending on their council.

Another barrier care leavers have reported to us is access to important identifying documents, which are vital for opening bank accounts, moving to independent accommodation, and gaining steady employment. Most councils in London, other than Barnet, Sutton, and Waltham Forest, state in their local offer that they provide discretionary financial support for identification and other important documents.

Most of the 33 boroughs – with the exception of Bromley, the City of London, and Sutton - indicated in their local care offer that they will assist with setting up bank accounts, with some offering referrals to local credit unions.

Forming positive financial habits as early as possible in life is crucial. This is even more necessary for young people leaving care, who lack the same support network as children living with their families. Therefore, good guidance around savings and investments, so that care leavers can take steps to save for a financially secure future, can be a really important service delivered by councils.

19 councils make clear in their local offer that care leavers will be given access to savings set up in their care, alongside advice and support in how to use their savings for the future. Councils are obligated to open a Junior ISA or Child Trust Fund for care leavers if they were in their care for more than 12 months. Yet this may not be made clear in their local offer. Become have reported that care leavers often experience difficulties accessing the full amount of savings they're entitled to following their time spent in care, especially if they've experienced a number of placement moves.

All local offers should detail the support made available to care leavers to help them access the full amount of savings they're entitled to when they turn 18.

## Care Leavers with unresolved immigration or asylum status & No Recourse to Public Funds

It is crucial that a young person's immigration or asylum status is resolved before they turn 18, when certain rights and entitlements, including access to legal aid for separated children and specific pathways to citizenship for those under 18, end. <sup>7</sup>

Once these children transition into adulthood and become care leavers, their situation is made far more complex by their unresolved status, as they may lose out on the support that British and settled care leavers receive. If they leave care without status and are undocumented, they will be subject to 'no recourse to public funds'. This means they lack entitlement to the majority of financial support on offer for care leavers.

Some councils have attempted to lessen the burden on care leavers with unresolved status, but this forms a patchwork of support at best. A growing minority of councils provide financial assistance and support for citizenship applications, which are costly and complicated – this includes Barnet, the City of London, Havering, Hillingdon, and Lambeth.

Greater Manchester has recently renewed its pledge to support looked after children and care leavers with insecure or unresolved status. Its commitments entail<sup>8</sup>:

- Identify all our looked after children and care leavers with insecure immigration status
- Connect them with legal advice so they can be supported to make the most appropriate immigration applications and challenge immigration refusals
- Support those who are eligible to apply for British citizenship
- Continue to provide access to leaving care services

But on the whole, little support is available to care leavers whose immigration status is still unresolved after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. On analysis of the local offers, only Croydon details sustained and specific financial provision available for those care leavers with No Recourse to Public Funds. Care leavers can access a prepaid card which is provided with weekly subsistence payments of £45, fully subsidised rent and utility bills in accommodation sourced by the council, and travel payments for getting to college. Haringey also offers £57.90 per week for up to 4 weeks for those who are NRPF.

### Examples of best practice

Local Authority	Details
Croydon	Provide prepaid card and subsistence payments of £45 per week, subsidised rent, and travel payments for getting to college for those on NRPF.
Haringey	Provide £57.90 per week for up to four weeks for those who are NRPF status.
Hillingdon, Lambeth, Hackney, City of London, Barnet,	All provide some form of financial assistance for immigration applications. Lambeth, Hackney and Barnet pay for naturalisation on 18 <sup>th</sup> birthday, City of London provide £400

<sup>7</sup> Legal aid is now available to all separated children for their immigration (non-asylum) matters, including citizenship cases. See <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2019/9780111188903>; [https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2019/1396/pdfs/ukdsi20191396\\_en.pdf](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2019/1396/pdfs/ukdsi20191396_en.pdf).

<sup>8</sup>[https://secure.manchester.gov.uk/news/article/8729/council\\_renews\\_its\\_commitment\\_to\\_help\\_childr\\_en\\_and\\_young\\_people\\_affected\\_by\\_brexit\\_immigration\\_changes](https://secure.manchester.gov.uk/news/article/8729/council_renews_its_commitment_to_help_childr_en_and_young_people_affected_by_brexit_immigration_changes)



	towards citizenship applications and Hillingdon pays 50% of naturalisation fees.
--	--

## Birthdays, festivals, and other significant points in life

The loneliness of being a care leaver can often be compounded at points of significance in the young person's life.

Many councils in London already provide allowances or cash gifts to young people in their care for milestone birthdays and to celebrate religious festivals, such as Christmas, Eid or Hanukkah. Some councils continue to offer these allowances or gifts to care leavers up to the age of 25, though often at a reduced rate.

Of the 33 London Councils, 19 provide cash gifts or allowances to young people at least up until the age of 21 for birthdays and other important milestones.

### Examples of best practice

Local Authority	Details
City of London	Provide £50 yearly for birthdays, £100 for wedding gifts, and £200 new baby gift.
Hackney	Provide between £75-£150 up until the age of 21 for birthdays.
Camden	Provide between £75-£100 up until the age of 21 for birthdays.

## Accommodation

Depending on their local authority in London, care leavers will have widely different experiences of moving into independent accommodation for the first time.

Issues around housing and homelessness represent 16% of initial enquiries to Become's Care Advice Line, which rises to 18% for contacts from Greater London. This is the largest issue the service supports care-experienced young people with.

Firstly, the Setting up Home Allowance, which assists care leavers with buying essential items when moving into permanent accommodation differs between local authorities in London. Government guidance recommends that this should be up to around £2000, however, the value of the leaving care grant varies from £1000 in Redbridge to £2500 in Bromley, £2200 in Tower Hamlets, and £3000 in the City of London.

Practice in administering the Allowance also varies considerably across London. Become have found that the allowance is often used for purposes outside of those suggested in statutory guidance, such as accommodation deposits. Restrictions on how and where it can be spent, alongside the processes for accessing it, also prevent care leavers from acquiring the furnishings or equipment they need. This can force them into their own pockets, creating further financial insecurity. Therefore, local offers should also detail how their Setting Up Home Allowance is delivered, working alongside care leavers to ensure this aligns with their needs and wishes.

The Children's Society believes that care leavers should be given priority need for social housing. Whilst all councils in London list care leavers as possessing some form of priority

status on their Housing Allocation Scheme, this often isn't cross-referenced with their local offer. Currently, only 13 councils in London state in their local offer that care leavers are priority groups for social housing in their area. This means that care leavers may not be aware of their priority status on the housing register in many local authorities leading to confusion when they begin to live independently.

In addition, care leavers contacting Become have reported difficulties in communication between housing services and leaving care teams, with additional barriers such as independent living skills assessments creating even longer waiting times, which leads to instability. Alongside the local offer, local authorities should ensure they have a clear and accessible joint housing protocol for care leavers which follows the Government's good practice advice<sup>9</sup>.

The growing number of young people who live 'out of area' in care creates additional barriers for those accessing housing as a care leaver. Across London, 53% of looked after children in 2020 were placed outside their home authority, of whom 28% were placed more than 20 miles from their home<sup>10</sup>. The area where they now live may not afford them the same priority status for social housing despite their vulnerability, which means young people face a difficult choice: either apply for housing where they currently live based on a weaker 'local connection' claim, or apply in their home local authority where they stand a better chance but sacrifice the relationships, support networks, and opportunities in the area they may now call home.

Due to the short supply of social housing, care leavers are increasingly finding themselves placed in the private rented sector, or in temporary accommodation. Some councils in London may assist with paying for deposits, agency fees, and even the first month of rent in some circumstances. This varies depending on the council, with some only providing support if the care leaver isn't eligible for the discretionary housing payment or social housing.

Some care leavers may also benefit from living in supported accommodation for a period after they first leaving care. For example, Barking and Dagenham Council offer 'Learn 2 Live' Suites for young people that have become settled in education or employment to give them greater support until they are able to manage independent accommodation.

The House Project is a national programme which gives care leavers the skills, experience, and support to create their own home. It acts as an alternative path for care leavers, in which adults and young people in and leaving care work together to refurbish properties that then become their homes, helping to build a long-term community of support. Currently there is a pilot project being run in Islington, with eighteen young people having moved into their own properties.

Once again, it is clear that care leavers face a patchwork of support when they take their first steps towards independent living. A London-wide offer would ensure a consistent housing policy was available to care leavers, enabling them to plan their futures with better ease.

### Examples of best practice.

Local Authority	Details
City of London	Provide up to £3000 as a setting up home grant, allow care leavers to remain in semi-

<sup>9</sup> Department of Education, 2020. *Joint Housing Protocols for Care Leavers Good Practice*. Available [online](#).

<sup>10</sup> Department of Education, 2020. *Children looked after in England including adoptions*. Available [online](#). [Accessed 30 May 2021]

	independent living arrangements until social tenancy is available, and provide Winter Heating money for the first year.
Bexley, Brent, Bromley, Camden, Croydon, Ealing, Greenwich, Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest	State that care leavers are prioritised on their housing register and detail the steps they must take to apply.
Southwark	Offers 12 month probationary tenancy to care leavers, and will pay first weeks rent if in housing association and four weeks rent + deposit if privately renting
Barking and Dagenham	Children and Young People who are settled in employment or education get a 1-2 bedroom apartment with license agreement.
Hammersmith and Fulham	Will pay deposit and 1 months rent. Will also provide payment for emergency accommodation for up to 6 weeks.

## Education, Employment, and Training

Care leavers often find it difficult to navigate living independently with having a job, training, or remaining in the education system post-18. Often a lack of qualifications and support to find a job conspire to negatively impact on care leavers' self-esteem. Nearly 39% of care leavers aged 19-21 were known not to be in education, employment, or training, compared to around 13% of all 19- to 21-year-olds<sup>11</sup>.

Furthermore, the costs of remaining in education or seeking a job or apprenticeship may be high for care leavers; this includes costs of travelling to and from work or education, clothing for interviews, money for specialist tools and equipment, and course fees. Care leavers also require extra support in sustaining employment, whether through expert advice and skills development or access to subsidised travel, or other job-related expenses.

Care leavers seeking education, employment, or training, face a variety of policy offers depending on their 'home' authority in London. 16 local authorities state in their local offer that they offer some form of travel subsidy if care leavers remain in education or training. For example, Hackney supplies an 18+ zone 1-6 travelcard if the care leaver is in education and training. Kensington and Chelsea will support with transport costs to training or job interviews and also supplies £15 a week for lunch money if they are in work.

18 local councils in London state that they will give some support for job related expenses, ranging from providing clothing for job interviews, support to by specialist equipment or uniform, to paying course fees. Southwark Council provides all care leavers in higher education with a laptop worth up to £400, up to £100 for books and field trips, and up to £200 per year towards course fees and awarding body costs.

Become's dedicated Advice and Support Officer for Further and Higher Education regularly supports care leavers with their educational journeys. Enquiries around education represent 11% of all contact with their Care Advice Line, with advice and support needs including finances, accommodation, support for postgraduate study, and making applications to college or university.

<sup>11</sup> Department of Education, 2020. *Children looked after in England including adoptions*. Available [online](#). [Accessed 30 May 2021]

It is a requirement that all local authorities provide care leavers accessing higher education with a bursary of £2000, normally split evenly across the duration of their course. However, Become have found that the timing and delivery of this bursary often prevents it from being used as effectively as it could. Local offers should be clear on when and how this bursary is delivered, along with any other entitlements for care leavers in higher education or other training routes. Some Local Authorities provide gifts upon graduation, such as the City of London, Croydon and Harrow. Others provide financial assistance for accommodation during vacation, including Camden, Ealing, and Hillingdon.

In his recent manifesto, the Mayor of London promised to introduce half price travel on TfL services for all care leavers. This will make a huge difference to all care leavers, not just those in employment, education, or training.

Apprenticeships are often seen as a good employment option for young people, although care leavers may be put off by the low levels of pay and entry requirements, especially the requirement to have up to five GCSEs at grade A\* to C. Therefore, it is positive to see that some London Councils offer traineeships or apprenticeships to care leavers. For example, Waltham Forest have a number of apprenticeships with the council specifically for care leavers. Other councils also provide the offer of 1-1 tuition and 'Virtual Schools' to help care leavers improve their skills.

A London-wide offer for care leavers, working with the Mayor and all local councils, could establish a dedicated programme to support care leavers to access meaningful education, training, and employment opportunities across London. This could include priority for any apprenticeships local authorities may have on offer, 1-1 tuition, and help with writing CVs and applying for jobs.

### Examples of best practice

Local Authority	Details
Brent	Up to 10 apprenticeships available to care leavers a year. Traineeship programme offered twice a year for all care leavers who don't have qualifications for apprenticeship scheme.
Hackney	Provide zone 1-6 travelcard if in education, employment, or training.
Hillingdon and Hounslow	Offer to pay for driving lessons and theory test if in education, employment, or training
Lambeth	Pay FE course fees subject to assessment
Southwark	Provide up to £400 for a laptop, and pay for job related expenses for clothing, travel, and lunch money. Also provide £300 per year for travel around London.

## Our Work – Bright Light

Bright Light is a pilot programme delivered by Catch22 and The Children's Society to support care leavers into education, apprenticeships, employment, and training. Through 1:1 support from coaches, alongside specially created job fairs and group sessions, participants can build their confidence, overcome barriers, and realise their potential.

At the time of his referral, Karl was studying for A Levels in Business Studies, Sociology, and Media Studies, but this was disrupted by the pandemic. Karl moved to a new home four times during 2020, with the Bright Light team having to adapt to new ways of working.

Karl was eager to work with his Bright Light Career Coach, being supported with CV reviews and adjustments, help writing cover letters, and assistance registering with online jobsites. Eventually, Karl applied for a Business Administration apprenticeship with the London Borough of Enfield. The application was in-depth, with practical elements he had never come across before. Additionally, he required work clothing and encountered travel expenses.

Working with his Bright Light Career Coach for further support, they worked on mock interviews and Karl received financial support for both appropriate interview attire and travel expenses. Karl was successful in securing his role, and the Career Coach continues to have monthly check-ins with him. Both Karl and his employer are thrilled with the placement.

## Health and Well-Being

Leaving care can present young people with new challenges to their physical and mental health. Often the services care leavers were previously entitled to as children are no longer available once they turn 18, with young people facing a drop-off in support. Looked after children and care leavers are also between four and five times more likely to self-harm in adulthood than the general population<sup>12</sup>, yet there is often very little support as young people leave care, or need to transition from CAMHS to adult mental health and well-being services. Newham Council states that they will support care leavers with the transition from CAMHS to adult mental health services, but this practice isn't replicated across all London Councils, meaning that care leavers in some London boroughs will find it more difficult to access mental health services in the future.

For care leavers, building healthy habits and lifestyles often can be difficult, especially if they are facing financial difficulties, living in unsuitable accommodation, or have a limited support network. 14 councils across London state they offer some form of subsidised leisure for care leavers, allowing them to exercise without worrying about the financial cost. Some councils achieve this subsidy through a bursary which care leavers can apply for. For example, Greenwich Council allows care leavers to apply through the Health and Wellbeing panel for up to £150 per year for gym membership. Other councils may provide care leavers with discounts or free access directly through partnership with council run leisure centres, such as Newham or Lewisham.

Some councils also provide some additional support to improve care leavers health, with Barking and Dagenham offering yearly assistance with new glasses and dental costs, Ealing paying the cost of prescriptions, and Lewisham covering the cost of transport to go to health appointments. Whilst care leavers may be entitled to free prescriptions due to receiving

---

<sup>12</sup> Department of Health, 2012. *Preventing suicide in England: A cross-government outcomes strategy to save lives*. Department of Health, London, pp.22.

benefits, in practice it can be difficult for them to know if they are eligible and apply for the discount.

### Examples of best practice

Local Authority	Details
Barnet, Bexley, Greenwich, Hackney, Hammersmith and Fulham, Harrow, Haringey, Hillingdon, Merton, Newham, Redbridge, Tower Hamlets, Wandsworth	Provide some level of subsidy for local leisure centres and exercise classes to care leavers.
Barking and Dagenham	Provide support for costs towards glasses and dentist.
Ealing	Pays prescription costs.
Lewisham	Pays transport costs to health appointments.
City of London	Funding is considered for mental health services.

## Further Policy Innovations

Across London, there are examples of local authorities going beyond their statutory obligations to care leavers to deliver innovative solutions to the problems they face when they begin to live independently.

Digital exclusion is a problem which care experienced young people face acutely. Despite requiring access to the internet for education and employment opportunities, a report by the Partnership for Young London and The Pan London Children in Care Council<sup>13</sup> found that almost half of young care leavers faced difficulties connecting to the internet daily. This digital divide has been exacerbated by the COVID pandemic, with young people missing out on socialising with their peers, work, and education. Therefore, it was positive to see Islington Council commit to providing all care leavers with free Wi-Fi in their first year of living independently – it is also the first local authority in the country to do so.

As explored in the Education, Employment, and Training section, care leavers often struggle with some of the extra costs associated with seeking education or employment opportunities, especially with regards to paying for specialist tools or equipment or travelling to work. Some jobs may require individuals to be able to drive which is another significant cost facing care leavers as they enter the world of work. To mitigate some of these costs, both Hillingdon and Hounslow Councils offer some of payment for driving lessons and tests for care leavers, as long as they are in education or employment.

Another issue which has been reported to us has been the lack of spaces available to care leavers to drop in to for support. In Romford, The Cocoon, one of the few dedicated support hubs for children in care and care leavers in London, was opened in 2017. The centre provides a safe space for children and young people living in care or leaving care, where they can meet with key workers and progress with personal development.

<sup>13</sup> Partnership for Young London and Pan London Children in Care Council, 2020. *The Digital Divide: Internet Access for Care Leavers*. <https://www.partnershipforyounglondon.org.uk/post/the-digital-divide-internet-access-for-care-leavers>

## A model to emulate? The Greater Manchester Care-Leavers Pledge

The ten local authorities which make up the Greater Manchester Combined Authority established a Greater Manchester-wide Care Leavers Trust in early 2019 to deliver improvements in support for care leavers across the city region.

One of the trust's first policy initiatives was to agree a council tax exemption for all care leavers, until the age of 25, across Greater Manchester irrespective of the care leavers' 'parent authority'. The council tax is designed to be just one part of a suite of support GMCA and local councils will offer to care leavers, with the trust committed to developing and implementing a Greater Manchester Care Leavers common core offer, setting out a consistent minimum offer of support across the conurbation.

The offer comprises the **five** following elements:

- That no care leavers will be classified as being intentionally homeless.
- Care leavers will be able to access a clear, consistent education, employment, or training offer.
- There will be access to a mentor for every care leaver that wants one.
- Care leavers will be supported as a priority group within the health economy which includes free prescriptions for care leavers up to the age of 25.
- Free transport for care leavers across GM until the age of 21.

We believe that local authorities in London, and the Greater London Authority, can follow the example of Greater Manchester, and should seek to develop a common local offer for care leavers across the city. Whilst we recognise that there are different governance arrangements in Greater Manchester, with political will and cross-partnership working, we believe a similar set of arrangements could be put in place across London for the benefit of care experienced young people.

## Recommendations for a pan-London Offer

As explored throughout this briefing, care leavers experience a variety of different responses and opportunities depending on their 'parent' authority. This lack of a consistent offer of support for care leavers across London adds to the confusion that many feel as they begin living independently.

Therefore, The Children's Society believes that all London Councils and the Greater London Authority should come together to agree to a pan-London 'common core' offer for care leavers. This would mean that care leavers who have been in the care of any London authority will have a consistent minimum package of support available to them as they transition to adulthood.

We recognise that the development of a pan-London offer is no easy task and will require multiple agencies working together over time to agree to a common core offer. However, the experience of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority shows that with the political will, it is both possible and can make a huge difference to the lives of care leavers.

This pan-London care leaver offer should include some of the below policies:

- A London care leavers digital hub which sets out entitlements and opportunities for care leavers in London in one place.

- A pan-London council tax exemption, meaning that care leavers who have been in the care of any London authority will be exempt from paying council tax wherever they live in the capital, up until the age of 25.
- Local authorities in London should ensure that all looked after children have their immigration status secured before they leave care. For care leavers where this hasn't been the case, councils should support them to secure their status as a priority. Where there are costs associated, for example in applying for citizenship, the local authority should meet these costs.
- A commitment that local authorities across London reserve a set number of their in-house apprenticeships for care leavers, ensuring that they are given guidance and support from the application process through the end of their placement.
- Free or subsidised prescriptions for all care leavers in London aged 18-25.

A council-by-council comparison of each local care offer is also available as a separate download.

Please contact Joe Farnworth-Mayers, Local Public Affairs Officer at [joefarnworth.mayers@childrenssociety.org.uk](mailto:joefarnworth.mayers@childrenssociety.org.uk) if you have any questions.