

Financial support policy for young people aged 16 and 17 who are either looked after or receive leaving care services from Kingston and Richmond councils

Introduction

Every young person aged 16 to 21 (or up to 25 if still in education) who is looked after or who receives leaving care services from the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, should receive a copy of this policy from their social worker or personal adviser (their worker).

This policy does not apply to young people who are still living with a foster carer or in a residential home

The aim of this policy is to explain to young people the types of financial support they can expect to receive from Kingston and Richmond councils via Achieving for Children's (AfC's) Leaving care Services.

AfC will look after you and act as corporate parent until you are 18 years old, which is when the law recognises you as an adult rather than a child. However, the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 also recognises that young people continue to need parental support for the first few years of their adult lives. So, after your 18th birthday, and until you are aged 21 (and for as long as up to age 25 if you continue in education), we will help you towards independence and support you to achieve your full potential, through education, training and employment.

We want to help and support young people reach adulthood and independence successfully and most do this with varying levels of support. However, it is important to remember that we can only provide financial support where the request is reasonable and our resources allow. It will be difficult for us to provide additional financial resources to young people who are not co-operating with agreed arrangements or whose behaviour leads us to believe money will not be spent appropriately or wasted.

Kingston and Richmond councils are required by law to provide equal opportunities to all young people, regardless of their gender, race, disability, religious belief or sexual orientation. This financial support policy explicitly acknowledges that we have a duty to provide equal opportunities to young people who have come to the United Kingdom from other countries, as far as legislation permits us. Where legislation makes it difficult for us to provide equal opportunities, we will always look for alternative ways to try to act equitably and fairly, where we are unable to do so, we will provide clear explanations.

At the back of this policy is a list of useful organisations that you can contact for further advice and information.

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1 Young people who are eligible for financial support

The level of support you will get from Achieving for Children doesn't just depend on how old you are. It is also dependent upon which category you fit into as defined in the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. If you are unsure which category you come under, please ask your worker to explain as it can seem quite complicated.

Have you had at least 13 weeks of being looked after since you were 14, some of which has been since your 16th birthday? If the answer is yes, then you belong to one of the following categories:

1.1 Eligible child

If you are 16 or 17 and still in care then you are what is called an **eligible child**. If you are an eligible child you will have a pathway plan when you are 16 saying how children's services will help you get ready for leaving care.

1.2 Relevant child

If you are 16 or 17 and leaving care then you were an eligible child and have now become a **relevant child**. If you are a relevant child, the local authority must provide you with somewhere suitable to live and enough money to live on.

1.3 Former relevant child

The local authority must continue to provide you with accommodation and subsistence money until you are 18 and become a **former relevant child** (often referred to as a care leaver). The local authority must maintain contact with you, assist you with your pathway plan and help you achieve the goals in it. The pathway plan will be reviewed at least every six months and more often if necessary. A personal adviser will be appointed to help you. You will receive support until you are 21, or if you are staying in education or training the support will continue until that ends.

It is important for young people to work closely with their worker to make sure that thorough reviews of pathway plans are done at least every six months. If your circumstances change, then you should ask to review your pathway plan with your worker even if six months have not yet passed. AfC may not agree to requests for financial support that have not already been agreed in the pathway plan.

If you feel unclear or unhappy with the information recorded in your pathway plan, please ask your worker to make it clear to you as soon as possible. If you still feel unclear or unhappy, please ask to speak to your worker's manager or the looked after children's participation officer. We want you to know as early as possible whether we will agree or decline financial support, so that you can make alternative plans if necessary.

2 Support for eligible and relevant young people aged 16 and 17 years

Achieving for Children is required by law to provide equal opportunities to all young people, regardless of their gender, race, disability, religious belief or sexual orientation. This financial support policy explicitly acknowledges that we have a duty to provide equal opportunities to young people who have come to the United Kingdom from other countries, as far as legislation permits us. Where legislation makes it difficult for us to provide equal opportunities, we will always look for alternative ways to try to act equitably and, where we are unable to do so, we will provide clear explanations.

2.1 Living allowance, housing and other financial support

For most young people aged 16 and 17, we will pay for your accommodation, give you a living allowance and support you financially with a range of needs including education, training or employment.

We will pay a living allowance into your bank account at a rate equivalent to **Income Support** (IS) or **Jobseeker's Allowance** (JSA). From April 2015 to March 2016 this amount is £57.90 a week. If you have to pay a service charge out of this to your accommodation provider, the amount should be stated in your pathway plan. If you do not have a bank or building society account, please talk with your worker about setting one up.

If you find it difficult to manage your money, we will offer budgeting advice. If you often run out of money, we may give you smaller, more frequent sums of cash or go to the shops with you instead of paying your living allowance directly into your bank or building society account.

If you are on a training course (for example, e2e) where a weekly allowance is paid directly to you, we will not pay the living allowance. However, if the weekly payment is less than £57.90, we will pay the difference.

A weekly bus pass will be provided on your oyster card to enable you to get to college or to seek employment. This will be reviewed after three months and may be withdrawn in circumstances where it is evident that you are not using it for this purpose. In the first instance you will be supported to apply for a zip oyster card from your school, college or training centre.

If you are a 16 or 17 year old parent, you will probably claim benefits from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and tax credits from HM Revenues & Customs for your family's living costs, but we will continue to pay for your housing until your 18th birthday. You can still ask AfC to help you with the costs associated with education, training and employment. Please talk with your worker about the benefits and tax credits you can claim.

2.2 National Insurance number

If you are aged 16 or over and you do not have a National Insurance number, please talk to your worker about how you can get one before your 18th birthday. It will be very difficult to get a job or welfare benefits without a National Insurance number.

If you came to the UK as an unaccompanied asylum seeking child, then you may not be able to get a National Insurance number due to your immigration status. This is something that is controlled by the Department for Work and Pensions and not children services.

2.3 Discretionary payments

All payments above the living allowance and housing costs are discretionary and not an entitlement. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 sets out the priority areas for discretionary funding above the living allowance. The priority areas are:

- travel costs for education, training and employment, etc
- education materials and special equipment
- other educational costs
- costs associated with needs (such as a disability or pregnancy)
- the costs of childcare
- clothing
- contact with family or other significant relationships
- cultural and religious needs
- counselling and therapeutic needs
- hobbies and holidays.

It is important to talk to your worker about any needs or plans you have and make sure that your pathway plan records any requests or agreed funding.

Discretionary payments must be agreed by the team manager or strategic manager. All such payments will be monitored and reviewed to ensure no individual or group is unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged by the administration of discretionary payments. A record of such payment will be kept on the general budget system and individually on file.

If you have any specific needs that are not covered in this policy, we encourage you to talk with your worker. Your worker will talk with the team manager about your request and do an assessment if necessary.

2.4 Education and training

We will encourage you to attend college or take up training and employment opportunities. We will help you claim any funds you may be entitled to, as explained below.

2.5 16 to 19 education bursary

All young people aged 16 to 19 who attend full time education in school or college will be supported by their worker to make a claim for a college bursary. The amount you receive will depend on good attendance. You could be eligible to receive up to £1,200 annually paid to you by the school or college.

2.6 Course fees

When researching what course you want to do, ask the college about tuition fees. If you will have to pay tuition fees, you must discuss this with your worker and have the discussion recorded in your pathway plan and reviews. This discussion should ideally begin at least three months before your course begins so that you and your worker have enough time to fully explore all potential sources of funding. For example, you may be eligible for Discretionary Learner Support Funds (DLSF). You can also get advice on funding from the Educational Grants Advisory Service, whose details are listed at the end of this policy.

If you cannot find any other funder to pay your course fees, you can ask us to pay. We will pay for your course fees only if:

- you have fully explored alternative sources of funding; and
- you have begun discussing this with your worker before the course begins (ideally at least three months before); and
- your pathway plan shows that the course is essential for you to progress along your chosen career path; and
- you can demonstrate at least 85% attendance on any previous course of education or training.

2.7 Travel expenses

If you are attending a course of education then we may be able to help with the travel costs to and from this course. However, if you decide to stop studying then this means that any travel money given to you to travel to college will also stop.

2.8 Essential equipment and activities

Your college has special funds to help students pay for essential equipment and activities connected to your course of education or training. If eligible, you should apply to your college's Discretionary Learner Support Fund (DLSF). Your worker will help you make the application.

If your DLSF application is refused, you can ask for AfC to help you instead. We can give an allowance of up to £100 per academic year to help you buy essential equipment or pay for activities connected with your course. Before we agree to pay, we will check with your college that the item or activity is essential and that your attendance has been over 85%. You should make sure that your request is recorded in your pathway plan.

If you want to start a course for which essential equipment and activities will cost more than £100, and you intend to ask AfC to pay for these, please speak with your worker and record

the request in your pathway plan as soon as possible (ideally at least three months) before the course begins.

To raise more funds, we can help you apply to educational trusts and charities. Organisations listed at the back of this policy (such as the Educational Grants Advisory Service) can give further information.

2.9 Books

We will pay up to £50 per academic year for books which your course tutor confirms are essential, and which you cannot get from the library or pay for by other means, such as DLSF, on condition that your attendance is at least 85%.

2.10 Child care costs while studying or training

If you are a parent of a young child and you are on a college or training course, you will probably be eligible for the 'Care to Learn' scheme. Care to Learn will pay up to £175 per child per week. This money includes costs for childcare (you will need to use an Ofsted registered childcare provider), registration fees and travel costs. You should apply for Care to Learn before the course begins and your worker will help you with this. Whilst on the Care to Learn scheme may also be eligible for the 16 to 19 education bursary.

If you are not eligible for the Care to Learn scheme, you can ask AfC to help you with the costs of child care while you are attending your course. You should talk to your worker about this before you begin any course and ensure that this is recorded in your pathway plan. To encourage you to participate in education and training, AfC will always try to meet reasonable costs. Your worker will talk to the team manager about your request.

We will disregard child benefit payments when deciding whether to give you extra financial support.

2.11 Looking for work

We can help you while you are looking for work. Here are some examples.

- We can help to complete applications forms and CVs.
- We can practice interview skills with you.
- We can give you information on education, employment and training opportunities.
- We can pay for your travel costs to job interviews (please make sure you have an Oyster card).
- We can give you one-off payments of up to £200 to buy suitable clothing for an interview or for a job.
- We can give you advice and support to get onto a college course which may increase your work opportunities.

Any funds and support agreed must be recorded in your pathway plan and reflect your efforts to seek employment in a chosen field.

After you get a job, you may still be able to get financial help from AfC. Make sure that you speak with your worker and record the request and the decision in your pathway plan. If you get a job, you will need to pay towards your rent and we will agree an amount with you (Paying your rent if in work gives more detail).

2.12 Young people with a disability

We will work closely with AfC's Disabled Children's Services to make sure you are able to get the support and services you need. If you have a disability, language difficulty or specific additional needs then these will be taken into consideration when assessing the level of financial support you will need.

2.13 Clothing

The minimum amount of clothing we consider suitable for young people aged 16 and 17 is listed below.

- A winter coat
- Two jumpers or sweatshirts
- At least two pairs of jeans
- At least two skirts
- Sufficient underwear
- Three t-shirts
- Two shirts or blouses
- One pair of trainers
- One pair of shoes
- A large holdall, rucksack or suitcase (we will never expect you to move your clothes in a plastic bag or bin liner)

Young people who are leaving foster care or a residential home should leave with at least the minimum set out above. If you do not have all these items, please speak with your worker.

Any payment for clothing will only be agreed after your worker has visited your accommodation and assessed your clothing needs. Your worker will probably ask to go shopping with you and will need you to give receipts.

AfC can give 16 and 17 year olds up to a maximum of £275 for clothing over the course of a year. The clothing allowance is an assessed allowance and not an entitlement, so it will be paid for specific items. After your 18th birthday, AfC will not give you money for clothes, unless they are needed for your college course or job, and the cost has been agreed in your pathway plan.

2.14 Maternity grant

If you are a former relevant child and you give birth to a baby while you are still 16 or 17, you will probably be able to claim Income Support. If this is your first child and you are in receipt of Income Support you should apply to the Jobcentre for a Sure Start Maternity Grant worth £500. This money is for you to buy essential items for your baby. Any future babies will not be eligible for a maternity grant unless you have a multiple birth.

If you are not eligible for the Sure Start Maternity Grant, AfC will pay you a £500 maternity grant instead. We consider essential items for a new born baby to be:

- a cot
- three sets of bedding
- four sets of clothing
- sterilisers and bottles, if needed (we encourage breastfeeding)
- a buggy, rain cover and cosy-toes
- a baby bath
- baby wipes and baby toiletries
- nappies (disposable or re-usable)

If possible, you should try to save some of your maternity grant for when your baby gets bigger and you need to buy items such as larger clothing, safety equipment and toys.

Your worker will also offer to help you get good quality, second hand baby and toddler items if you would like. Your baby will grow out of things very quickly, so if you can get some things for free you can make your maternity grant last for much longer.

2.15 Contact with family or other significant relationships

We will support you to maintain contacts with people who are important to you. For young people who are not from the United Kingdom, and who have family and friends in other countries, we can give a monthly international calling card worth up to a maximum of £10. We will support you to use the Red Cross International Tracing and Messaging Service.

For young people who have significant relationships with family and friends in the United Kingdom, we may give you a travel warrant for you to visit loved ones. We will also consider other requests. We will ask to speak with the person you want to visit before we give you the travel warrant. Your worker will need to talk with the team manager about your request.

2.16 Birthdays

On your 16th and 17th birthdays, we will pay you £20. This could be in vouchers, an item or (if agreed) cash. On your 18th birthday, this will be £40.

2.17 Birth certificates

We will help you and pay for you to obtain a certified copy of your birth certificate, if possible.

2.18 Religious celebrations

Whatever your religion, faith or belief, we will give you a cash payment of £20 once a year to contribute towards any celebration you may wish to make.

2.19 Physical and mental health needs

We will help you get services for any physical or mental health needs you may have. For example, we may pay for your travel costs to appointments and we may accompany you if you wish. Please talk to your worker and make sure any request for help is recorded in your pathway plan.

Most 16 and 17 year olds are eligible for free health services. If you are not automatically entitled to free health services, you should complete an HC1 form. The HC1 takes about a month to be processed and then you will receive a HC2 certificate giving you free or very low cost health services. The HC2 has to be renewed every six months. Additional payments will be considered by your worker for necessary health needs.

2.20 Special interests, special aptitudes, holidays and passports or travel documents

We encourage you to take part in a range of activities and will provide you with a leisure card so that you can take part in leisure activities at sites across the borough at reduced costs. Furthermore, AfC will fund £20 monthly gym membership until your 18th birthday.

If you have a special talent in music, sport, the arts or another field, which you need extra money to pursue, we can consider a wide range of requests. You should talk with your worker about any request for funding and make sure this is recorded in your pathway plan.

We cannot usually pay for young people to go on holiday. However, we may pay for trips that form part of your educational course or give you an important opportunity to pursue a special interest or aptitude. We will ask you to apply to your college's Discretionary Learners' Support Fund before we consider your request. Please make sure that your request is recorded in your pathway plan.

If you do not already have a passport or travel document by the age of 16 or 17, and you are eligible for one, we will pay for your application. Please talk to your worker if you think you may be eligible for a passport or travel document.

2.21 Driving and cycling

We cannot usually pay the full cost of the provisional driving licence, lessons and test. However, if you can show that you need to learn to drive in order to follow your education, training or career path, then we will consider contributing up to a maximum of £350.

You will need to discuss your request with your worker and you must ensure that your request and reasons are recorded in your pathway plan.

If you can show that you need to cycle to your place of education, training or employment, AfC will consider making a contribution up to a maximum of £350 for the cost of a bicycle, helmet, lock and lights.

We cannot fund driving lessons and the cost of a bicycle.

2.22 Approaching 18

After your 18th birthday, we will continue to encourage and support you to become more independent. As we will no longer be able to pay you a living allowance you will need to talk with your worker about the welfare benefits you will need to claim and the documents you need to support your benefit claims.

Instead of receiving a living allowance from AfC, from the age of 18 most former relevant children will claim Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance from the Jobcentre (soon to change to universal credits depending on where you live). To get Income Support, you need to be studying for 12 hours or more a week, be a lone parent, or be able to provide medical certificates from your GP confirming that you are too sick to work.

Otherwise, you will need to claim Jobseeker's Allowance (universal credit). The amount of money you receive on Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance is the same - £57.90 a week paid directly into your bank account. However, to get Jobseeker's Allowance, you will need to sign at the Jobcentre every two weeks and show that you are actively seeking full time work.

Instead of your housing being paid by AfC's Children's Services, you will become responsible for your housing costs, but you can claim Housing Benefit (universal credit) from the local authority where you live if you are getting Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance, or if you are working on a low income.

You should also ask your worker whether you will be responsible for Council Tax and whether you need to apply for Council Tax Benefit or Council Tax exemption.

If you know what your address will be on your 18th birthday, you can claim Housing Benefit up to 13 weeks before your 18th birthday.

If you are eligible for welfare benefits, then you are not eligible for any living allowance after your 18th birthday. As the Jobcentre usually takes around two weeks to process claims for Income Support (IS) and Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA), we will lend you, on a discretionary basis, Living Allowance for up to two weeks after your 18th birthday. You will be asked to repay this money when welfare benefits are subsequently backdated so that you are not paid twice for the same period.

If your claim for IS or JSA has not been processed within two weeks and you have no money to live on, we will help you apply to the Jobcentre for an advance payment. If the Jobcentre

refuses to give you an advance payment, you can ask us for an emergency payment. Your worker will discuss your request with the team manager.

If you get welfare benefits and your circumstances change, you must immediately tell the Jobcentre and the Housing Benefit department (and any other agency from which you receive money or benefits). Otherwise, you might be overpaid benefits, which the Jobcentre or Housing Benefit department could make you pay back. A large overpayment of Housing Benefit could lead to your housing provider evicting you from where you live. A few common examples of changes of circumstances (there are lots more) which you must tell benefit agencies about follow.

- Starting work, even if you only work a few hours a week. (Some young people believe that if they work for less than 16 hours a week this will not affect their benefits and that they do not need to tell the Jobcentre. This belief is false).
- A change in your immigration status.
- Moving home.
- Starting or finishing a full time college or university course.

If you are an unaccompanied asylum seeking child who has been granted leave to remain only until you are 17 ½ or 18 years old, you should ask your legal representative if you can apply for further leave to remain before your original period leave expires. You will only be able to claim welfare benefits after your 18th birthday if you have made an application for further leave to remain before your original period of leave to remain has expired.

If you have exhausted all your immigration appeal rights and you are unlawfully present in the United Kingdom, you will not be able to claim welfare benefits after your 18th birthday. It may become unlawful for us to continue supporting you financially after your 18th birthday. Therefore, we must carry out an assessment under the European Convention on Human Rights to decide whether it is lawful to continue to give you a living allowance and pay for your housing, as well as additional financial support.

3 Reference documents

The following legislation, documents and organisations have been referred to in the formulation of this policy.

- Children Act 1989
- Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 Regulations and Guidance
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Supporting Care Leavers: a Training and Resource pack for people working with young people leaving care (DH)
- Care Matters: Time for change
- Children's Rights Officer's Association
- London Borough of Hounslow: Young People's Guide to Financial Assistance 16-17 year olds
- London Borough of Hounslow: Young People's Guide to Financial Assistance 18 + years old
- London Borough of Richmond upon Thames: Financial Provision for Care Leavers
- City of London: Allowances (for 16+ looked after children and care leavers)
- Can the State be a Good Parent?
- The National Leaving Care Advisory Service (NLCAS)
- If this were my Child - A Councillor's guide to being a good corporate parent
- Rainer Foundation - What makes the difference?
- Quality Protects Programme – to ensure that young people leaving care, as they enter adulthood, are not isolated and participate socially and economically as citizens
- Royal Borough of Kingston's Children and Young People's Plan 2006/2010
- Royal Borough of Kingston's Children and Young People's Participation Strategy 2006
- National Leaving Care Advisory Service
- The Fostering Network
- The Who Cares? Trust