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# **Advice for care leavers**

The definition of who is a care leaver generally is an adult who has been looked after (often including the provision of accommodation) by the local authority for at least 13 weeks when they were a child, with at least one day being past their 16th birthday. The duties owed and services available to care leavers will vary depending on the nature of the care they were provided as a child and the length of time they were in care. If you are unsure you should speak with your Personal Advisor (PA).

If you’re a care leaver under the age of 18 the children’s services department will be responsible for ensuring you have accommodation.

All care leavers up to the age of 21 should have a Personal Adviser (PA) who can provide on-going support. If you do not have one, contact the Children’s Service department on the details below.

**Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub**

Email:mash@westsussex.gov.uk

Phone: 01403 229900

The common concerns of care leavers at different stages are often:

* I will soon be turning 18. How do I find somewhere to live?
* I’ve been told my accommodation through social services will be ending. What should I do next?
* Where can I afford to live and how will I afford to pay rent and daily living costs?
* What can my Independent Living Grant be used for?
* What Benefits am I entitled to?
* Can I join the housing register?
* Can I get help with my other support needs?
* What help will the Housing Advice Team give me?

**Additional Duties and Services**

It will usually be the Children’s Services department at the local authority who provided you with care as a child that will owe you Leaving Care services.

If you are an adult the local housing authority will be required to assess any additional duties owed to you if you need housing assistance. Remember that these services might not be provided by the same local authority. In West Sussex, West Sussex County Council provides Children’s Services and the housing services are provided by the district and borough Councils.

If you are owed leaving care duties under section 23C of the Children Act 1989 you will have a Local Connection for housing advice and homelessness services to any district within the children’s services authority that owed you that duty. This means that if you were provided with care services by West Sussex County Council you will have a local connection for housing services to throughout West Sussex. These include Arun District Council, Adur and Worthing Borough Council, Chichester District Council, Horsham District Council, Mid-Sussex District Council and Crawley Borough Council.

If you are aged under 21 and normally live in a different area to that of the local authority who owes you leaving care duties (and have done for at least 2 years including some time before you turned 16) you will also have a local connection to that area.

**16 and 17 year old care leavers**

Most 16 or 17 year old care leavers are not eligible for Benefits. You will be able to make a claim for Universal Credit on your 18th birthday. West Sussex County Council is responsible for:

* Providing you with accommodation or helping you find your own place.
* Supporting you financially to pay for your rent, food, bills, travel costs, education and/or training, clothing, pocket money and childcare (if you have a child).
* Providing you with any support you need including finding work, continuing your education and dealing with personal problems.

You will usually only be able to claim benefits if you are a 16 or 17 year old care leaver and you are a single parent or unable to work because of a disability of illness.

For more information contact your Personal Adviser.

**18 to 21 year old care leavers**

If you are 18, 19 or 20 years old and you were in care aged 16 or 17 (and no longer in care) you will likely be entitled to help with finding accommodation from the Housing Advice Team. You will likely have a ‘priority need’ until your 21st birthday which means the District Council should help you find a place to live. Children’s Services can also help by providing support.

If you are in higher education Children’s Services must find you somewhere to live during holiday periods if you need it. You can make an online claim for Universal Credit from your 18th birthday. It takes about 45 minutes to complete the application. You may be entitled to Universal Credit even if you are working.

To make a Universal Credit claim and to find out more, please follow the link here: [Universal Credit: How to claim - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit/how-to-claim)

Care leavers aged 18, 19, 20 and 21 years will be entitled to Housing Benefit or the Universal Credit Housing component at the one-bedroom Local Housing Allowance rate. Those who have not been in care are only entitled to the much lower Shared Accommodation rate (for a single room). However, your entitlement reduces to the shared accommodation rate on your 22nd birthday and existing claimants should then complete the DHP application if your housing costs become unaffordable due to the change in eligibility.

**21+ year old care leavers**

Some care leavers who are aged 21 years or older might still be entitled to accommodation from the Housing Advice Team. This might be if you are:

* Vulnerable as a result of being in care,
* Haven’t had a stable home since leaving care,
* Have slept rough since leaving care.

If you are in higher education Children’s Services might find you somewhere to live during holiday periods if you need it.

Whether you are working or not you may still be entitled to Universal Credit to top-up your income. You can make a claim online. Care leavers are entitled to the Housing component at the one-bedroom rate until you 22nd birthday. If you are still entitled to the Housing component after your 22nd birthday it will be at the much lower Shared Accommodation rate until you are 35 years old.

**Other Information**

When you leave care you're given a Pathway Plan setting out what support you might need to live independently. You should be given a personal adviser whose job it is to make sure and help you to claim everything you are entitled to. They can help you with application forms for housing, benefits, and education and/or training courses. They should also help you with building life skills such as budgeting.

Your personal adviser should stay in contact with you and provide ongoing support and help until you turn 21 or until your 25th birthday if you are still studying full time.

In Chichester, care leavers might be entitled to a free gym membership to help them keep healthy and active. You can ask your personal adviser for more information.

**What is a “Local Connection”?**

This term has different meanings for different services. Applicants need a local connection to be owed a duty to help you secure accommodation or to be eligible for a housing register.

As a West Sussex care leaver, you will be able to get free housing advice from any local housing authority in the country. If you are homeless and need extra help, they may however refer you to a Council where you have a local connection. If you have been cared for by West Sussex County Council then you will have a local connection to a West Sussex Local Authority.

Local connection in terms of eligibility for the housing register will vary between Councils. As a West Sussex care leaver you are likely to be eligible to apply for all West Sussex housing registers.

For further information on the housing register in the Chichester District, please follow the link here: <https://www.chichester.gov.uk/applyhousingregister>.

**Housing Benefit & the Universal Credit Housing Component**

This is a benefit to help you pay for accommodation. You will be entitled to either claim Housing Benefit or the Housing Component of Universal Credit, depending on the type of accommodation you have.

How much money you get to pay for your housing costs is determined by the Local Housing Allowance. Your entitlement depends on your age as explained above. You can read more about the LHA rates in Chichester here: [Benefit calculator: Chichester District Council](https://www.chichester.gov.uk/Benefitcalculator)

If you are under 35 years of age and you rent from a private landlord you will usually be entitled to the Shared Accommodation rate. This is the maximum Housing Component you would receive from Universal Credit depending on your circumstances.

However, if you are a care leaver this will not apply until you are 22 years old. You should be entitled to the 1-Bedroom rate.

Your benefits might be affected if you are in education or training. You should seek further advice from the relevant Benefits department (e.g. Universal Credit, DWP or Housing Benefit) if you are concerned about this.

**The Housing Register**

Chichester District Council operates a Housing Register. You can make an online application through the Council’s website. A link to the application form is here: <https://www.chichesterhomemove.org.uk/>

Care leavers might be eligible for the housing register if your placement was made by West Sussex County Council or if you were placed by another local authority within the Chichester district.

Once you have applied Homemove will assess your application and confirm whether you meet the criteria to be accepted. If you are accepted onto the register you will be placed under one of the four bands (A, B, C and D). The band is determined by the details you provide on your application regarding your need to move. Band A represents the highest need to move while Band D, the least priority. You should provide Homemove with as much information regarding your care placements as you can. You might also want to provide contact details for your Personal Adviser.

If you are on the register, you can choose from the range of vacancies and bid if you are interested in being put forward for the property. You will need to log on to the Homemove website to do this with the details that are sent to you. You can bid on a maximum of three properties each fortnight. Bids can be made either through the website, by text message, post, telephone or by visiting the Council’s offices in East Pallant, Chichester.

You may be considered ineligible for the housing register if you have a history of crime, antisocial behaviour or housing related debt.

**Private rental assistance**

The Council runs a rent in advance and deposit bond scheme for eligible applicants to secure accommodation in the private sector. Your Housing Advice Officer will assess whether you are eligible for the scheme. If you are eligible for private rental assistance, we would need to work together to look for suitable accommodation at the correct Local Housing Allowance rate and then assess whether the property is a suitable option for you.

If the criteria are met we will look to help support you with a loan for ‘rent in advance’ and a deposit ‘bond’. The ‘rent in advance’ will be paid by the Council directly to the landlord and the Council expects this to be repaid at a small installment each week. The deposit ‘bond’ is a contract between you, the landlord and the Council. We will need to check that the landlord is happy to accept our ‘bond’ scheme and that the property is suitable for you.

If you require further advice, or you are homeless or threatened with homelessness, please submit a housing triage form to us here: <https://www.chichesterhomemove.org.uk/>

**Other Help**

The following services offer help to care leavers:

**West Sussex County Council (WSCC)** – if you have left WSCC care you can ask the Leaving Care Service to assess your needs and potentially re-allocate a Personal Advisor who will assist you for a certain period. You can ask for this support anytime up until your 25th birthday. They offer services from advocacy to care leavers’ support groups.

**Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)** – if you are not sure how to seek help the CAB can provide you with a direction on who to speak with. The CAB in Chichester is based in the Chichester District Council’s offices.

Address: East Pallant House, Chichester PO19 1TY.

Phone: 0808 278 7969

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>

**Shelter** – provides advisory services to those with a housing need.

Emergency Helpline: 0808 800 4444

<https://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice>

**Chichester Find it out Centre**

Website: [https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/education-children-and-families/your-space/places-to-go/finditout-centres/chichester-finditout/#](https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/education-children-and-families/your-space/places-to-go/finditout-centres/chichester-finditout/)

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