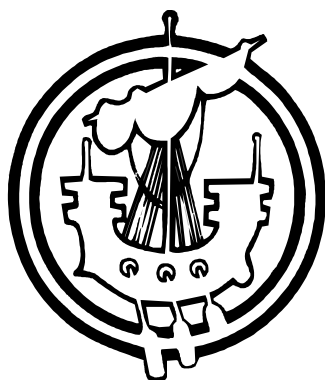


COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR



THROUGH CARE, CONTINUING CARE AND AFTERCARE SERVICES

OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE AND PROCEDURES

JUNE 2024

getting
it right
in the western isles



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GLOSSARY

Aftercare

Aftercare is the provision of advice, guidance and support the Comhairle offers the young person who leaves formal care on or after their sixteenth birthday until they are twenty-six.

Care-experienced

A person who has experienced formal care under the supervision of social workers through foster care, adoption, residential care, kinship care, secure care, or under a Compulsory Supervision Order (CSO) at home.

Comhairle

The Comhairle nan Eilean Siar is the local authority council for the Outer Hebrides and is referred to as the 'Comhairle' throughout this document.

Continuing care

Continuing Care refers to the Comhairle's duty to provide young people whose final placement, on or after their 16th birthday, was in foster, kinship or residential care with the same accommodation and other assistance as was being provided, immediately before the young person ceased to be care experienced.

Corporate parenting

The formal and local partnerships between all services responsible for working together to meet the needs of care experienced children, young people and care leavers by being a 'Good Parent'.

Extended Learning Resource (ELR)

ELR offers provision within Education, Housing support, Residential Short Breaks and Outreach sessions to support to young people with their learning, social, emotional and behaviour needs,

and work with parents and carers across the Western Isles.

Foyer Project

Local service for 16-25 year olds who are homeless, have housing needs or subject to other significant social disadvantage.

Hillcrest

The name of the local children's house for children and young people requiring residential care away from home in the Western Isles.

Housing Support Service

This service provides accessible, flexible and personalised housing support services to young people ages 16 – 19 in the Western Isles in critical need or as part of a transition plan.

The Promise

This is Scotland's promise to care experienced young people that they will grow up loved, safe, and respected and follows the outcome of the Independent Care Review. This is a programme of change for Scotland's care system to improve outcomes for care experienced young people.

Throughcare

Throughcare is the process by which the Comhairle plans and prepares a young person who is care experienced for the time when they will live more independently.

Young person's review meeting

Previously called a Looked After Child (LAC) meeting. This meeting is to review the Child Assessment and Plan (CAP).

INTRODUCTION

In Scotland, the average age for leaving care is 16 – 18 years old, whereas the average age for peers leaving home is 22 years old. Young care leavers must be prepared appropriately for leaving care, and at a time in which they are ready, rather than because they have reached an age where they are expected to move on. Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) have smoother transitions to adulthood when they have been settled in secure, stable care for as long as they need it, and when they are properly supported to take steps forward into adult life ([CELCIS, 2023](#)).

Instability, changes, and a lack of permanence in living arrangements for CEYP are unsettling and can hamper support for a young person preparing to move on from care. Leaving care can be a difficult, chaotic and isolating experience which can lead to fluctuating mental health for CEYP.

Throughcare and Aftercare services should be made available to all CEYP who meet the criteria in terms of Section 29 & 30 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, and work from the perspective of the young person. The core principles outlined in the Children's (Scotland) Act 1995 are:

- The welfare of the young person is the paramount consideration,
- The views of the young person should be ascertained and considered in respect of any significant decision about them,
- The Comhairle has a duty to provide advice and assistance, with a view to preparing the young person for when they are no longer in the care of the local council, and
- The Comhairle has a duty, unless they are satisfied that the young person's welfare does not require it, to advise, guide and assist CEYP in their area who were care experienced at school leaving age or thereafter up to the age of 26.

Within the Outer Hebrides, Children's Services Social Work will work collaboratively with partner agencies and Corporate Parents to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and young people, in line with the [Integrated Children's Service Plan](#).

The Care Inspectorate has published [Guidance for Services on the Provision of Continuing Care, Throughcare and Aftercare](#) in December 2022.

PRINCIPLES

The transition towards inter-independence is a gradual and natural process. Individual young people will be ready for inter-independence at varying stages of their life depending on their own unique circumstances.

Preparation towards adult life for a CEYP should be an ongoing process which develops throughout their time in care, especially during early adolescence. Young people should leave care or have their CSO discharged when they are ready rather than at a predetermined chronological age.

Preparation and planning for CEYP requires resources to be made available if the young person is to have any meaningful choice in their future.

CEYP have the right to be consulted about every aspect of their transition towards inter-independence. Only through working in partnership within the preparation and planning process can any support be meaningful. It is essential to recognise the diversity of the needs and wants of young people and respond sensitively.

Any young person leaving care should not expect to be isolated or lonely. Everyone in the community is inter-dependant on others for social and personal needs. Hence, the expectation of a young person living independently should not mean that they must manage or cope alone. Research has taught us the importance of relationships when achieving best outcomes for children and young people. Having the continuation of the social worker in the Lead Professional role should go towards this and we should also encourage ongoing relationships with foster carers, kinship carers and staff who work at Hillcrest.

Many young people leaving care want to return home to their parents and family. This desire should always be an assessed option within the Throughcare process. Denying this fact should be avoided, despite professional reservations about a young person returning home. What is vital is to continue to support those young people who do return home.

Any preparation for a young person moving towards adulthood should respect and incorporate their diversity in relation to gender, sexuality and disability.

The preparation for young people living inter-independently should involve the significant people in their lives. Within this network, the young person should be central with their best interests at the fore in the formulation and implementation of all plans for their future.

Above all, moving towards independence is a psycho-social transition. Therefore, while practical skills are important, high priority must be placed on developing the self-esteem and confidence of the young person, with particular reference to interpersonal and relationship skills.

Moving towards independence is difficult for all young people with or without support from family or friends. Recognition that planned arrangements are not working is not an admission of failure. It is important that plans are reviewed for that reason.

OBJECTIVES

To assist and enable young people we work with to:

- a) Build relationships with others.
- b) Increase their self-esteem.
- c) Develop practical and financial skills and knowledge.
- d) Create a safe and stable personal environment.
- e) To advocate for young people in exercising their rights.
- f) To assist colleagues in preparing and implementing planned programmes relevant to the needs of the young people.
- g) To establish positive relationships with Housing providers and develop a range of accommodation resources pertinent to the needs of young people, this will include supported flats and supported carers.
- h) To engage in inter-disciplinary team work with those people providing the care, educational and health needs of the young person.
- i) To encourage and support young people towards involvement in training, employment and leisure pursuits.
- j) To offer a service which recognises the need for flexibility, including access to support staff 7 days per week where necessary.
- k) To offer intensive support accommodation on a planned admission basis.
- l) To maintain records sufficient to ensure that planned programmes are implemented with efficiency and effectiveness.
- m) To continually evaluate and critically assess the Throughcare & Aftercare service in order to ensure that it offers the highest quality of service to the young people.

THE PROMISE

The Independent Care Review published [The Promise](#) plan in 2020, which set out what needs to change in the care system to make sure every child and young person feels safe, loved and respected. The Care Review listened to over 5,500 voices of care experienced children, young people, their families and the paid and unpaid workforce, and their experiences shaped everything that the Care Review concluded. The Promise reflects the commitments and changes Scotland needs to make before 2030; some of these commitments are related to throughcare, continuing care and aftercare planning and services:

VOICE

- Children and young people must be listened to and meaningfully and appropriately involved in decision-making about their care. Professionals should properly listen and respond to what they want and need.

- Decision making must take account of what is reported by people who children and young people trust, rather than relying on a professional hierarchy.
- Powerful voices of professionals in meetings, must not dominate and crowd out the voices of children and young people and those who are closest to them.

FAMILY

- Decisions taken about support must involve children, young people and families with a focus on meeting their needs, as opposed to the system's needs.

CARE

- Children and young people should belong to a loving home and stay there for as long as needed.
- For children and young people to remain in a stable home, there must be ongoing and intensive support to enable this. Any support given should be timely, judgement-free, any time they need it and for as long as they need it.

PEOPLE

- There must be a reassessment of professional guidelines and boundaries to make kind and loving behaviour the norm, and trust for the workforce to make connections with young people and act in kindness.
- The language we use must not stigmatise care experienced children and young people further by using over-professionalised jargon. We must stop using words like "placement", "unit" and "LAC".

SCAFFOLDING

- When young people become adults, the help does not stop. Young people should feel fully prepared for adulthood, know how to ask for help when they need it, and be given this help when they ask.
- Organisations will support care-experienced children, young people and their families in a trauma-informed way.

Transitions

Many care experienced young people told the Care Review how scary and upsetting transitions are and specifically that the transition away from their families or the place they called 'home' was often badly managed. We must better at recognising the significance of the transition period so that young people are supported to be trauma free, and so transitions must:

- Be limited.** Scotland must limit the number of transitions for children and young people. Support must wrap around families and the settings of care, so that carers and families are supported to stay together.
- Be relational.** All transitions must take place with a trusted adult that the child or young person knows and feels safe with. Transitions, at any stage, must never be carried out by an unknown professional.
- Be planned.** Transitions must not take place in a hurry and feel like an emergency. Children and young people must never again take their belongings in bin bags and not have time to collect important personal items.
- Be informed.** Everyone involved in a transition – the child or young person, the family from which they are being removed and the family or safe, loving environment to which they are going – must have as much information as possible.

The Comhairle is a Corporate Parent to CEYP who receive formal care, guidance, or support from social workers in the Western Isles. The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 outlines a range of duties for Corporate Parents across Scotland to safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of CEYP. The duties came into effect on 1 April 2015. This means corporate parents should listen to the needs, fears and wishes of CEYP, and be proactive and determined in their collective efforts to address these. The Comhairle should look after CEYP as any other parents would look after their own children.

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 defines corporate parenting as “the formal and local partnerships between all services responsible for working together to meet the needs of looked after children, young people and care leavers”. This includes promoting the physical, emotional, spiritual, social and educational development of the child or young person.

- [‘These Are Our Bairns’](#) – guidance for Community Planning Partnerships on being a good Corporate Parent.

Under the law, Corporate Parents must work together to give you the love, security and chances that any good parent would. They must make sure you are safe, healthy and cared for, and help you succeed (WhoCares? Scotland, 2023). Corporate Parents have some key duties to CEYP including:

- a) to be alert to matters which, or which might, adversely affect the wellbeing of CEYP,
- b) to assess the needs of those children and young people for services and support it provides,
- c) to promote the interests and rights of those children and young people,
- d) to seek to provide those children and young people with opportunities to participate in activities designed to promote their wellbeing,
- e) to take such action as it considers appropriate to help CEYP, and
- f) to work together with other Corporate Parents to improve planning and practice, and to be better Corporate Parents.

CONTINUING CARE

In October 2013 the Scottish Government published the [‘Staying Put Scotland’](#) guidance, which gave a clear message that young people should not be forced to leave local authority care before the age of 18. The Comhairle has a duty to provide Continuing Care and young people who are sixteen years of age and are accommodated by the local authority (excluding Secure Care) can now request to remain in their existing placement up to the age of twenty-one.

The guidance highlighted the positive impact maintaining relationships had for care leavers on improving their long-term outcomes. It also drew upon practice experience that showed longer, carefully planned transitions at a point when the young person was ready, as opposed to a defined age, delivered improved outcomes. The Comhairle should provide Continuing Care unless to do so would not be in the young person’s interests, or should the carer be unable or unwilling to continue providing accommodation. Providing Continuing Care does not remove the responsibility on the Comhairle to provide Aftercare support.

A young person in Continuing Care accommodation would no longer be deemed to be formally looked after by the Comhairle, and they would be entitled to the same support as if they were. Young people leaving care continue to have poor outcomes despite the efforts and investment by services. Research clearly shows us that the transition period towards interdependence is when young people are most vulnerable. This is the time when responsible corporate parenting can make a difference to the life of a care-leaver. Delaying the exit out of care for young people until they are sufficiently skilled and emotionally ready is not a new phenomena. The Staying Put approach takes this idea further and demands a needs led assessment, and promotes the importance of consistent positive relationships. Young people are encouraged, enabled, and empowered to remain in positive care settings until they are ready to move on. The Comhairle will ensure

that young people are aware of their right to remain in their placement and give them the opportunity to exercise that right.

For best guidance on Continuing Care, please read [Continuing Care and the Welfare Assessment: Practice Note](#) please read by the Care Inspectorate.

RELEVANT LEGISLATION

[CHILDREN \(SCOTLAND\) ACT 1995](#)

The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 centres on the needs of children and their families. It sets out the duties and powers available to local councils to support children. The following Sections relate to Throughcare, Continuing Care and Aftercare duties:

Section 17	Duties of the local council to a child who is looked after by them.
Section 25	Provision of accommodation for children by the local council.
Section 26a	Provision of continuing care: looked after children
Section 29	Aftercare duties and guidance
Section 30	Financial assistance towards education or training expenses for 16 – 25 year olds

[REGULATION OF CARE \(SCOTLAND\) ACT 2001](#)

The main aim of the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 is to improve standards of social care services through modernising regulations of care services. Care services and their staff must conform to established standards, or they may be de-registered and no longer able to provide services.

The Act modernises the regulation of care services and, at Section 73, strengthens the provisions of Section 29 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995.

[CHILDREN AND YOUNG PERSONS \(SCOTLAND\) ACT 2014](#)

- [Part 9 – Corporate Parenting](#)

Section 56	Corporate parents
Section 57	Application of part: children and young people
Section 58	Corporate parenting responsibilities
Section 59	Planning by corporate parents
Section 60	Collaborative working among corporate parents
Section 61	Report by corporate parents
Section 62	Duty to provide information to Scottish Ministers
Section 63	Guidance on corporate parenting
Section 64	Directions to corporate parents

- [Part 10 – Aftercare](#)

The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 has been amended in 2014 to set out that local councils have a legal duty to:

- Prepare young people for leaving care or ceasing to be in the formal care of the Comhairle, and carry out an assessment of their needs,
- Provide advice and assistance to young people leaving formal care on or after their sixteenth birthday but not yet nineteen years of age, unless satisfied that their welfare does not require it, and
- Provide advice, guidance and assistance to a care leaver between the ages of nineteen and twenty-six who requests this from the Comhairle.

This does not apply to a person who is being currently provided with Continuing Care.

- [Part 11 – Continuing Care](#)

The Children (Scotland) Act 2014 provides the legislative framework to ‘encourage, enable and empower’ care experienced young people to remain in positive care placements longer. “Continuing Care” means the same accommodation and other assistance as was being provided for the person by the local council, immediately before the person ceased to be looked after.

The duty to provide continuing care does not apply if:

- The accommodation the person was in immediately before ceasing to be looked after was secure accommodation,
- the accommodation the person was in immediately before ceasing to be looked after was a care placement and the carer has indicated to the council that the carer is unable or unwilling to continue to provide the placement, or
- the local council considers that providing the care would significantly adversely affect the welfare of the person.

[THE SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE OF YOUNG PEOPLE LEAVING CARE \(SCOTLAND\) REGULATIONS 2003](#)

These regulations deal with the provision of aftercare under section 29 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 for young people who are care-experienced on or after their sixteenth birthday and until they turn twenty-six. They also provide for throughcare preparation for young people leaving care, and the responsibilities of the Pathway Co-ordinator under sections 4, and sections 7-12 of the Act.

CATEGORIES OF CARE EXPERIENCE

- a) Looked after at home through a Compulsory Supervision Order (CSO),
- b) Looked after away from home – in foster or residential placement,
- c) Kinship placement with a CSO,
- d) Secure accommodation care, or
- e) Previously care experienced, where at some point in their lives they have had any of the above experiences.

STRUCTURE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Responsible Local Council

The regulations make clear that the responsible local council is the council that is looking after, or last looked after, the young person.

Management Structure – Social Work

Chief Social Work Officer
Children’s Services Manager – Children and Families
Children’s Services Manager - Resources
Team Leader - Children and Families

Management Structure - Education

Chief Officer for Education and Children’s Services – Donald Macleod
Senior Education Officer for Harris, Uists and Barra – Mary Clare Ferguson

PLANNING MEETINGS

The Child Assessment and Plan (CAP) – Needs Assessment

[The Children \(Scotland\) Act, 1995](#) and regulations supporting the operational guidance and procedures document require the Comhairle to carry out a needs assessment for aftercare services or Pathway Planning with and for young people who are at least 16yrs but are still in care. The CAP is a transparent framework to address the wellbeing needs of a young person leaving care and their needs for support thereafter, which should be reviewed annually and is statutory. The CAP will also set out how often the Team Around the Child (TATC) should meet to review progress made towards the outcomes identified in the CAP. From age fourteen, the social worker should initiate discussions at the CAP as to the appropriateness of the Throughcare and Aftercare Support Worker being introduced to the young person. This may enable more time for the young person and Throughcare and Aftercare Support Worker to establish and build a positive relationship and support future outcomes.

- All CEYP will have their needs assessed through the CAP before they leave care and will be referred to the Throughcare and Aftercare Support Worker for Pathway Planning.
- The CAP should be agreed with the young person and form the basis for preparing the Pathway Plan.
- The young person and relevant parties must have a copy of the CAP.
- The Comhairle must update the CAP within three months of a young person becoming care experienced.
- The Comhairle must keep a written record of the information obtained during an assessment, of the deliberations of any meeting held in connection with any aspect of an assessment; and the outcome of the assessment.

The regulations specify the essential issues which the Comhairle should address during the CAP. These are:

- The young person's health and development;
- Needs for education, training or employment;
- Needs for care and support;
- Accommodation needs;
- Financial needs;
- The extent to which they possess the practical and other skills necessary for independent living;
- The support available from family and other relationships.

The Team Around The Child (TATC)

The CAP meeting will identify when the TATC should meet to review progress made towards preparation for independence and Aftercare. Attendees will identify and discuss with the young person the main areas of preparation necessary for independence, and to address specific areas where further development is required. For young people with additional support needs there may be other/additional areas which need to be addressed which are more relevant to their needs and which should be discussed at this stage. Where possible, this support should be provided by existing people in the young person's life.

In regards to the TATC:

- A workable plan in detailing specific goals and objectives and timescales should be compiled with tasks and roles agreed amongst the group members.
- Minutes of the meeting should be distributed to all members by the social worker, and the date and location of future meetings.
- The social worker will commence an assessment of the young person in those areas pertinent to his/her transition to independence.
- Preparation for the transition towards independence remains a process in which all core members' play an integral part, and ongoing assessment of needs of the young person at this stage must remain a focused part of this work.

Attendance to Meetings

Any planned meetings must consider forthcoming exams and the young person's right to an education and should take reasonable steps to avoid disruption to this. The Comhairle should make every effort to ensure

that the young person can attend any meetings, should they wish to do so, for example by paying travel and subsistence costs. If the young person has any particular needs related to impairment or disability, the Comhairle should make sure meetings and information are accessible to them.

The young person is central to the assessment process and when deciding who needs to be involved in the CAP or TATC, the Comhairle should consider the wishes of the young person. If parties to these meetings are not required to attend in person, they should be asked to contribute by submitting a written update in advance of the meeting so that numbers of in-person attendees are minimised. Their written contribution is to be discussed through the meeting. Attendees to these meetings may include:

Should attend:	Views should be sought prior to the meeting:
The young person	Class teacher, guidance teacher or a representative chosen by the young person
The young person's parent, carer, or guardian	GP or appropriate health professional
Social worker – who may be the meeting chair for Pathway Review meetings	Anyone else considered relevant to the young person
Lead professional – if different to the social worker	Throughcare and Aftercare support worker
Advocate for the young person	The Named Person (if different to the social worker)
Anyone else requested to attend by the young person, that would be appropriate to attend	Throughcare and Aftercare Support Worker (if engaged with the young person)

If the young person has any particular needs relating to communication or cognitive impairment it will be important that at least one person involved in the needs assessment has a clear understanding of how they express their wishes and feelings. Other members to be included as appropriate and dependant on the wishes of the young person. The young person's views will always be listened to.

PATHWAY PLANNING

Pathways

The Pathways process is designed to help young people think about what they are currently doing and where they would like to be in the future. It focuses on hopes and aspirations and how to make these a reality. It is important to note that this must be done at the best time for the young person for the work to be effective. It is useful for the throughcare/aftercare worker to give support to the young person to go through the introductory sections of pathways.

Pathways is divided into seven areas of a young person's life and helps them think about what is going well, what concerns them and what actions/supports they feel they need. The seven areas are.

- Lifestyle
- Family and Friends
- Health and Wellbeing
- Learning and Work
- Where I live
- Money
- Rights and Legal Issues

For each area there is a structure that is followed which is My Pathways Views, the Pathways Assessment, the Pathways Plan and then the Review.

My Pathways Views

This is the young person's opportunity to say what they want about their life. They can complete this section on their own or with the Throughcare /Aftercare worker. They do not have to complete every question in my views section, it is optional. It is important to express to young people that the need for completing the "my views" section is to support the young person to fill out the assessment section. No one apart from those

involved in the pathways assessment process sees what the young person writes in their views section unless the young person wants to share it with anyone else. The Comhairle is not allowed to share a copy of the “my views” section with anyone unless the young person gives permission to do so.

Pathways Assessment and Plan

The Comhairle is responsible for identifying and writing down what kind of needs young people have and this document is called the Pathways Assessment. The Pathways Assessment should clearly identify what the young person is doing right now, where they want to be and what supports they will need to achieve hopes/aspirations. Once the assessment has been completed this information will be used to complete the Pathways Plan. This will set out what is going to happen, by when and who is responsible for taking actions.

Consent

There may be times when information sharing is helpful in the assessment and planning sections. The reasons for passing information on are:

- To help make sure that the information passed on will be supported by the correct services.
- So, you don't have to answer the same questions again.

At the end of the planning and assessment section the young person will be asked to give their consent for the information to be passed onto other services/agencies. The young person can change their mind about consent, withdraw or approve. If the Comhairle is seriously concerned about the safety of the young person or others involved, then they may have to pass on information for protection reasons.

Review of Pathway Plan

The review meeting is a meeting that occurs every six months to review the Pathways Plan that is in place. This usually involves the main services supporting the young person, the young person, throughcare/aftercare support worker and if needed the team leader. The planning and delegation of responsibilities should be an ongoing process within each meeting. Meetings should occur at a minimum of six-monthly intervals, although in the earlier stages of a young person's move to independence the meetings may be more regular depending on what the young person and team think. Minutes should be taken, and every individual should receive a copy of the minutes. In cases which are particularly complex or where wellbeing indicators are not being advanced, the Lead Professional can request a manager within Children's Services to chair the meeting.

ACCOMMODATION

The provision of suitable accommodation can make an enormous difference to a young person in making a successful transition to adult living. All available accommodation options should be explored with the young person as young people may want the highest level of independence or minimum level of support, whereas their needs may be inconsistent with this. Aspiration should be explained to them as something to be worked towards. The Pathway Plan will set out what kind of accommodation best meets the needs of the young person and how this is to be obtained.

Where the Comhairle has assisted a young person by providing them with, or supporting them in, accommodation, it must be ensured that any such accommodation is suitable. Planning for this must consider: the young person's views; any health needs; suitability of location; appropriate transport links for study or employment; accommodation arrangements while the young person is on holiday away from the accommodation.

If the accommodation provider will come into direct contact with the young person, references should be taken up and appropriate checks carried out.

[The Homelessness etc. \(Scotland\) Act 2003](#) has amended section 25 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987. This amendment means that persons aged 16 or 17 assessed as homeless are now included in the statutory definition of applicants to be considered as having a priority need for accommodation. In addition, anyone

assessed as homeless who is aged 18 to 20 who was looked after by the Comhairle, when they ceased to be of school age or at any subsequent time, will also be considered to be in priority need.

Accommodation Resources

Any discussion by the core group as to the most appropriate form of accommodation should refer for advice to the Children's Services Manager, who will hold current information and knowledge regarding local accommodation resources/availability and will advise on the options available. Options which are currently available or which are in the process of being developed are:

- Continuing Care
- Own tenancy – with or without Housing Support Service
- Individual supported lodgings
- Keith Street house – supported lodgings accommodation
- Return to the Family Home

Short Breaks and Emergency Placements

Aftercare resources such as Continuing Care or supported lodgings are more likely to be successful if placements are made with diligent planning and ongoing support for the young person.

Requests for short breaks or emergency placements from the Resource Panel must be routed through the Children's Services Manager.

Moving Out

When the young person is offered accommodation, the social worker will co-ordinate a planning meeting with TATC immediately. The purpose of this meeting is:

- a) To decide when the young person is ready to move to the proposed accommodation.
- b) To assess the suitability of the accommodation.
- c) What work (furnishings/decorations) will be required to upgrade the accommodation to acceptable standards.
- d) To ensure necessary financial arrangements have been made and all appropriate income and benefits have been accessed.
- e) Ensure necessary health arrangements in place, given the recognised health difficulties such young people can experience.
- f) To set contingency plans in the event of the current plan being unsuccessful. It is often the reality that even well-planned moves from care establishments can break down shortly after the young person has moved to their new accommodation. Transitions periods can be stressful and difficult, therefore planning by the TATC must consider a time period for maintaining the young person's bed in the previous accommodation.

Not only does a return home policy minimise the disruption for the young person involved, it serves to reduce the anxiety that many young people have towards leaving care, thus serving an essential preventative strategy. Where accommodation is planned with approved supported lodgings, to their own tenancy, or a return to the family home, the young person should have a series of planned introductory meetings prior to the placement commencing. The available options should be discussed prior to the transition so that the young person understands how the support system will operate.

Follow Up Visits

Every effort should be made to ensure that the young person's move into their new home is a positive and enjoyable experience. It is important to be aware that the initial euphoria a young person may feel when moving into a place of their own can rapidly disappear. Loneliness and isolation, combined with low income, create difficulties for many young people striving to establish an independent lifestyle. It is in this period, immediately after the move, that the young person may be in most need of assistance and support. The frequency of visits will be determined by the level of need identified through the young person's review meeting. These visits can be shared between the TATC and planned and agreed in advance with the young

person. Such visits are in addition to the other support services and drop-in facilities offered to the young people.

A TATC meeting should be held within 4 weeks of the young person's move to discuss the progress and any changes in circumstance for the young person and any challenges to the transition plan. This meeting should also consider the future pattern of the support and visiting, and the appropriateness of their previous placement being kept open. It is at this point that, if there is no immediate need for the young person to return to previous accommodation, then it can be considered vacant.

If a young person returns home, their parents or carers should be offered a welfare benefits appointment at the earliest opportunity in order to maximise their income.

FINANCIAL ASSESSMENT AND SUPPORT - OVERVIEW

The Comhairle may give financial assistance towards young people between the age of 16 until 26 years of age who are in aftercare. Financial support has the aim of assisting young people leaving care, as they enter adulthood, to have the means to participate socially and economically as active citizens. Care leavers are more vulnerable to adverse financial experiences when reaching independence and have significantly reduced support compared to their peers. The Comhairle may provide contributions to the accommodation, maintenance or other financial supports of any relevant person in any place where they may be employed, seeking employment, receiving education or receiving training as set out by [section 30 of the Children \(Scotland\) Act 1995](#).

These duties are set out in [The Support and Assistance of Young People Leaving Care \(Scotland\) Regulations 2003](#) and amended by [The Support and Assistance of Young People Leaving Care \(Scotland\) Amendment Regulations 2015](#) to extend the categories of aftercare support provided for by the 2014 Act:

- To ensure the Comhairle acts as a 'Good Parent' in the sourcing of or the provision of financial assistance to looked after young people in the process of leaving care and in the transition to adulthood.
- To ensure that young people receive suitable financial support whether directly or indirectly once they have left care and up until their twenty-sixth birthday.

In particular, this support will cover;

- Accommodation and maintenance for young people who have left care and are aged 16 and 17 years,
- General assistance for care leavers up to their twenty-sixth birthday,
- Help with education and training to the end of an agreed programme which may last up to their twenty-sixth birthday, and
- Provision of vacation accommodation for care leavers in higher education or further education courses that require the young person to live away from home.

Legal and Policy Context

[The Support and Assistance of Young People Leaving Care \(Scotland\) Regulations 2003](#) and [Supporting Young People Leaving Care in Scotland: Regulations and Guidance](#) defines the Comhairle's duties in terms of:

- The groups of young people eligible for financial assistance,
- The manner in which financial assistance is to be provided,
- The minimum levels of support for maintenance, and
- Financial assistance for accommodation costs.

[Chapter 8 of the Guidance](#) also outlines the Principles of Financial Assistance which can be summarised as follows:

- Young people in care and leaving care should be encouraged and assisted to learn to manage their own money,
- The Comhairle should make payments to care leavers into their bank account,

- A care leavers support package should be tailored to meet all their assessed needs as part of Pathway Planning,
- Incentives should be incorporated to encourage young people to participate in employment, training or education,
- Care leavers in further and higher education should be encouraged and supported in their studies, and
- Care leavers should not be expected to take out full student loans.

Eligibility Criteria

The young people to whom the local council has a duty to offer regular financial support are those who –

- Left formal care on their sixteenth birthday or beyond,
- Had been looked after away from home for 13 weeks since the age of fourteen, and
- Are under eighteen years of age.

Within the above group, two categories of young people remain eligible for DWP benefits for maintenance. These are:

- Young People with Disabilities who are eligible for Income Support and Disability Benefits, and
- Parents, who are eligible for Income Support for themselves and their children from the child's date of birth and maternity benefits immediately prior to the birth.

FORMS

Form 1: BACS Payment Form

Form 2: Application for Regular Financial Support Form

Form 3: Additional Aftercare Finances Form

Form 4: 12 Week Review – Financial Assessment & Change of Circumstances Form

Form 5: Emergency Cash Payments Form

Form 6: Application for Additional Payments Form

PROCESS TO ACTIVATE INCOME PAYMENTS

Financial Procedures:

1. Social worker to ensure that the young person has opened a bank account and that they complete the BACS Payment Form (Form 1).
2. Social worker completes the Application for Regular Financial Support Form (Form 2) and passes to Team Leader.
3. Team Leader authorises and signs the Application for Regular Financial Support.
4. Both forms to be processed by the Resources Section.
5. Resources Section issues a letter to the young person informing them of the start date and entitlement of their payments.
6. Resources Section sends an email to the social worker attaching an electronic copy of the letter sent to the young person confirming payment details.
7. Social worker assesses additional finances which can be applied for with young person (Form 3).

Every 12 weeks, the social worker should complete the 12 Week Review of Financial Assessment Form (Form 4) and this should be used to notify the Resource Section if there any changes to their circumstances which may affect payments.

The young person must be informed in advance if there are anticipated changes to the amounts of regular financial support provided by the Comhairle.

If changes to regular financial support are identified:

1. Where there has been a change in circumstances, the social worker must complete Form 4 and a new Form 2, detailing the young person's allowances and any relevant changes.
2. Team Leader agrees and authorises revised payment
3. Forms are processed by Resources Section
4. Young persons payment adjusted if required
5. Resources Section issues a letter to notify young person of revised payment and start date, and c.c. to the social worker

PAYMENT SYSTEMS

(a) Maintenance

Maintenance Payments will be paid weekly into the young person's bank account via the BACS System.

In exceptional circumstances Maintenance Payments may be paid in cash if there is a delay in opening a bank account or the care leaver is unable to manage the allowance safely on their own. The Emergency Cash Payments Form (Form 5) must be completed and will be reviewed on a 4 weekly basis by the team Leader.

(b) Additional Payments

An application may be made to the Team Leader for payment of an additional amount of up to £100.00 per quarter by completing the Application for Additional Payments Form (Form 6). It is anticipated that the additional Payment will help to purchase one off items such as;

- Clothing – essential clothing, interview clothing or work/training related items
- Personal Care
- Work/ Education/ Training Equipment (where not provided by trainer, etc.)
- Sport activities - i.e. gym membership
- Music/Leisure/Hobbies
- Pursuing Religious interests
- Driving Licence
- Passport Application

The Additional Payment may be accumulated throughout the year to assist the young person in the purchase of large goods. The application form (Form 6) should be completed by the social worker and the young person and passed to the Team Leader for approval then to the Resources Section for processing. The Additional Payment Scheme should be used carefully and meaningfully, and not seen as an additional £100 per quarter per young person. It is a finite budget.

FINANCIAL SUPPORTS AVAILABLE

The assessment of a young person's needs for financial support should always be undertaken prior to the young person leaving care. Please use the checklist on Form 3 to identify payments and entitlements for young people leaving care.

Universal Credit:

Universal Credit is a means-tested social security payment in the UK and it replaces six means-tested legacy benefits:

- Housing benefit
- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseekers Allowance (JSA)
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Child Tax Credit

- Working Tax Credit

There is an [eligibility checker](#) which can be used to identify the benefits and financial support available to young people.

Personal Independence Payment (PIP)

Care leavers who have a disability may be entitled to receive PIP to help with living costs if they have both:

- a long-term physical or mental health condition or disability and
- difficulty doing certain everyday tasks or getting around because of your condition

For eligibility, please see [Personal Independence Payments \(PIP\) eligibility](#).

Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

If the young person has a disability which affects how much they can work, ESA can be applied for whether they are employed, unemployed or self-employed. See: [Employment and Support Allowance \(ESA\)](#).

Job Start Payment

The Job Start Payment is available to help with the costs of starting a new job between age 16 – 25 years and can be applied for by care leavers. For more information and eligibility, see [Job Start Payment](#).

Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)

EMA's provide financial support to young people from low-income families to stay on in post-16 education either in school or on a college course.

A weekly payment of £30 can be made to young people - [Apply for or renew EMA](#).

Higher Education (Advanced)

Accommodation costs: Young people in advanced higher education (HNC and above) are not entitled to Housing Benefit. Accommodation costs will therefore be met by their place of study or by social work for the duration of the course and paid directly to the provider. In the first instance an application should be made to the University or College Hardship Fund.

Young people should apply for a bursary and student loan

Education Bursary Fund

Care Experienced Young People aged 16 – 19 can apply for a £1,200 bursary if they stay in full-time education. If going on to higher education (e.g. university), a £2,000 bursary is available for care leavers.

See: [16 - 19 bursary fund](#).

Unite Foundation Scholarship Scheme

Care leavers applying to university may be eligible to have their accommodation and bills covered for up to three years of study including at Robert Gordon University, Edinburgh Napier, University of Edinburgh, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow Caledonian University, and others. See [This is us: Unite Foundation Scholarship](#).

Support for Accommodation Costs

The Comhairle is responsible for payment of the young person's rent where they are compulsorily supported. The level of rent payable equates to the element of accommodation costs which would normally be met by Housing Benefit.

Rent costs should be entered in the initial Application for Regular Financial Support (Form 2). If there is any doubt about the accommodation costs, advice should be sought from the accommodation provider before completing this.

Payment of rent should be negotiated with the accommodation provider and agreed by the Team Leader, the Resources Section will arrange payments direct to the accommodation provider.

If a home is occupied exclusively by a care leaver then the home is exempt from Council Tax. If the property is shared with others who are not care leavers then partial discounts may be available. The [exemption form](#) should be completed and submitted with help from the social worker.

Scottish Welfare Fund

The [Scottish Welfare Fund](#) is a safety net for vulnerable people on low incomes. There are two grants available:

- The Crisis Grant – for emergency situations e.g. running out of food, disaster support e.g. fire/flood, replacing appliances such as a fridge or freezer, emergency help for heating.
- Community Care Grant – Intended for the purchase of furniture, household equipment, bedding, home insurance and TV licence and is available to young people leaving any form of care, who needs help to set up their own home.

Application should be made to the Scottish Welfare Fund immediately following a formal offer of accommodation. The Comhairle has the discretion to provide support in different ways and not all grants will be cash payments i.e. the Comhairle may provide any combination of cash, vouchers, fuel cards or furniture, and in the way the Comhairle identifies as the best way to meet the need. This is something which will be discussed and agreed through the young persons review meeting.

The social worker should utilise other resources available to assist the young person in setting up their home, such as the use of furniture banks or second-hand shops, to help the grant go further. Social work will make the difference up from the amount received through a Community Care Grant of £2000. This would be paid through Section 29 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. If a young person is refused a Community Care Grant the social worker or ELR worker, where appropriate, assist that person on requesting a review of the decision by the Social Fund Officer.

If there is an identified need for the young person to have supervised spending, this would be subject to assessment. Any such arrangements should be recorded in the written agreement from the planning meeting.

Cost of living payments

There are currently extra payments available to help with the cost of living, if you are already entitled to certain benefits or tax credits. See: [guidance on cost of living payments](#).

ENTITLEMENTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN AFTERCARE

The Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum (STAF) highlights the range of [financial support available to care leavers](#), and often highlight additional funding opportunities, or emergency grants as they are made available.

Travel Reimbursement and discounts

Young people who are supported by the local council and are not in training and employment may qualify to have travel reimbursement. It is intended that this will allow them to attend appointments, seek job and training opportunities, maintain links with friends and family and participate in leisure activities.

The social worker should support the young person to [apply for a Young Scot card](#), which will enable them free bus travel across Scotland up to twenty-two years among many other discounts.

Young people should also be made aware that with a Young Scot card, they can access two free return ferry journeys per year as a foot passenger. [Transport Scotland](#) provides more information on ferry concessions.

Young people with a residence in the Western Isles can also apply for the [Air Discount Scheme \(ADS\)](#) for discounted travel to and from the Western Isles.

Health Costs

Young people aged sixteen and seventeen who are compulsorily supported or receiving Aftercare, are entitled to full help with health costs. The social worker should help the young person complete a HC1 (SC) form, which can be collected from a local pharmacy.

In some circumstances, young people can qualify for help until age twenty-six under the NHS Low Income Scheme. Please refer to the [‘Help with Health Costs?’](#) guidance booklet.

Birthday Allowance

A birthday allowance will be payable to all care leavers. This will be paid with their weekly allowance. The amounts are as follows;

17th Birthday = £25,

18th Birthday = £50,

19th Birthday = £25

Grants from charities and businesses

Some charities offer grants for care experienced young people to help cover the costs of household items, education, training and employment. These grants may only be available if all other options have been exhausted:

[Chances for Children grant](#)

[Rees Foundation](#)

[The Capstone Care Leavers Trust](#)

CASE CLOSURE AND COMPLAINTS

Case Closure

It is essential that the decision to close a case by the social worker be made according to the needs of the individual young person and not based on chronological age. Any withdrawal by the social worker should not occur prior to the initial six month TATC meeting, where a full assessment of the need for continued social work involvement can be made at the planning meeting in consultation with those involved in the support of the young person.

Right to make representations and complaints

Young people should have access to independent Advocacy Services through [Who Cares? Scotland](#) to assist them when making a case and to help them see their case through to completion. The social worker should assist the young person to make the referral to Who Cares? Scotland if they wish for advocacy representation.

It is important that young people have swift access to an appeals system that is transparent and easy to understand. The Comhairle [Complaints Handling Procedure](#) sets out how this will be handled by the Comhairle and what can be expected as next steps. This procedure lays out the time periods for notification at each stage that must be adhered to by the Comhairle and support to the young person should be ongoing while any appeals process takes place.

Young people can complain [online](#), in person at any of our offices, [by phone, in writing, or via email](#).

