

## *Care Leavers*

You have been given this information because you have left care or will be leaving care soon.

If this is the first time that you will be living independently it is especially important that you are well prepared. Before leaving care you should be given a pathway plan which should identify what support you need to live independently.

If you are between 18 and 21 years (or up to 25 if you are in full time education) the children's services authority who looked after you may still have a responsibility for you and you may qualify for After Care Services.

### *Do I qualify for After Care Services?*

After Care Services can provide support with finding housing and financial support.

You will qualify for After Care Services if you are:

- 16 or 17 years old and are currently in care and you have spent a total of 13 weeks in care since you were 14 (including some time was while you were 16 or 17) you qualify as an **eligible young person**
- 16 or 17 years old and have already left care, you spent a total of 13 weeks in care from the age of 14 (including some time was while you were 16 or 17) you qualify as a **relevant young person**
- 18 to 21 years (up to 25 years if you are still in full time education) and you spent a total of 13 weeks in care since the age of 14 (including some time was while you were 16 or 17) you qualify as a **former relevant person**

### *Personal Advisers*

Before leaving care you should be allocated a Personal Adviser who will help you to:

- apply for housing and benefits
- identify your education and training options and
- develop the skills you need to manage your money and live independently

This support should be based on your individual needs which were identified in your pathway plan.

Your personal adviser will continue to support you until you reach 25 – unless you no longer want this help.

### *How Housing Services can help*

We will work with you to build on the housing options identified in your Pathway Plan to create a personalised housing plan which will include appropriate and realistic options to help you move out of care and into independent accommodation.

If you agree, we will involve your Personal Adviser in this process and keep them up to date with the efforts we are making to prevent or relieve your homelessness. Your plan may also include actions for your Personal Adviser to help you move forward.

Your plan may include:

- A referral to **supported accommodation**: If you aren't yet ready to live independently we can refer you to the YMCA who will assess you to see if they can offer you accommodation with the support you need to develop the emotional and practical skills you need to manage a tenancy and look after yourself effectively.
- Support to help you find **private rented accommodation** and help you with a cash deposit - see our factsheet "*Finding Private Rented Accommodation*" for more information on the support we can offer
- Support to apply for the **Rent Guarantee Scheme** which can help you access private rented accommodation. If you are accepted, we will guarantee your deposit and pay your rent direct to your landlord. You must pay your rent to us and save towards your own deposit. See our factsheet "*Rent Guarantee Scheme*" for more information on the support we can offer
- Support to apply to **Homechoice** (Reading's Housing Register for social housing). If you are between 18 and 21 years (up to 25 if you are in full time education) and the Care Leavers Team at Reading and the Voids and Lettings Team agree that you have the skills to maintain a property, manage a tenancy and look after yourself effectively you will be given an elevated banding which gives you higher priority for housing. You still have to bid for properties. *We may agree this even if you need some support to live independently.* Visit [www.reading.gov.uk/homechoice](http://www.reading.gov.uk/homechoice) to complete an online application form or pick one up from the Civic Offices reception.

### *Help with housing costs*

Once you are 18 you are entitled to claim benefits. If you are working and on a low income or if you claim welfare benefits you may be eligible for Housing Benefit or Universal Credit to help towards your rent. You may also be eligible for Council Tax Support. Use our online calculator to check your entitlement – [becs.reading.gov.uk](http://becs.reading.gov.uk)

You should check the Entitledto website to see if you could claim any other benefits - [www.entitledto.co.uk](http://www.entitledto.co.uk)

### **The Local Housing Allowance (LHA)**

LHA limits the amount of benefit/credit you could get towards your rent based on the number of bedrooms your household is eligible for

Usually if you are single and under the age of 35 you only qualify for the shared accommodation rate. However if you have been in care, this does not apply to you until you turn 22.

Shared accommodation	£81.14/week	£351.61/month
1 bedroom	£153.02/week	£663.08/month



*Children's Services are responsible for paying rent and providing other financial support to 16 and 17 year old care leavers until they are old enough to claim benefits*

## *Local Connection*

To qualify for help from Reading Borough Council you must have a local connection to Reading.

You have a local connection if:

- you are owed leaving care duties by Reading's children's services or
- you are a care leaver under the age of 21 and you are owed leaving care duties by another local authority and while you were in care you were placed outside their area and spent at least two years living in Reading including some time before you turned 16.



*If you are unsure where your local connection is contact the Homeless Prevention Service*

## *If you become homeless after leaving care*

The help you get depends upon your age:

- **Under 18 years:** Children's Services are responsible for finding you somewhere to live. They will carry out a joint assessment with the Homeless Prevention Service to look at your options.
- **18 years to your 21<sup>st</sup> birthday:** You can get support from both After Care Services and from the Homeless Prevention Service. If you were in care between the ages of 16 or 17 (even if you don't qualify for after care services from a children's services authority) we will assess you as being in priority need and provide you with emergency accommodation. If you are in full time education your After Care Service must find you somewhere to live during holidays (if you need it).
- **Over 21 years:** We may offer emergency accommodation if we assess you as being in priority need. We will consider:
  - how long you were looked after, accommodated or fostered for
  - whether or not you have had a stable home since you left care
  - if you have slept on the streets in the past

If you are between 18 and 24 years and you tell us that you are a care leaver we will contact the children's services authority responsible for you as soon as possible – we need your consent for this.

## *Contact the Homeless Prevention Service*

We are open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm. You will initially be seen by a Housing Advice Support Officer who will then allocate your case to either:

- a Homeless Prevention Officer if you are threatened with homelessness within 56 days or are immediately homeless
- a Homeless Resolution and Enablement Officer if you are still in accommodation but you are worried about becoming homeless in the future

Call: 0118 937 2165 (office hours)

Email: [Housingadvice@reading.gov.uk](mailto:Housingadvice@reading.gov.uk)

Drop-in: Civic Offices, Bridge Street, Reading RG1 2LU

This information can be provided in alternative formats (Braille, audio, large print) and other languages on request