

Pathway Planning Procedures

Supporting children in care into independence

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 These procedures are intended to provide additional information and guidance to assist staff involved with the assessment, planning and review of care leavers including:
- all staff and managers responsible for pathway assessment, planning and review;
 - Independent Reviewing Service staff and managers with responsibility for quality assurance of children looked after standards;
 - All staff and managers holding case responsibility for children looked after where pathways assessment and planning is being undertaken by personal advisers;

2. Context

- 2.1 These procedures are informed by:

[The Children \(Leaving Care\) Act 2000, Regulations and Guidance;](#)
[The Children Act 2004;](#)
[The Children Act 1989 Regulations and Guidance, Volume 3, Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers.](#)

- 2.2 Warwickshire county council are committed to supporting children in care to develop into successful adults with high aspirations. This includes being healthy, staying safe, enjoying themselves, achieving goals, making a positive contribution to society and securing economic well-being. Every child in care will have a specific process to support their care planning. For more details see the [Care Planning and Decision Making Guidance](#).
- 2.3 When a young person is approaching 16 years of age we must increase the focus on supporting their preparation for adult life. If the young person is entitled to a leaving care service then they are reallocated to a centralised specialist leaving care team who is responsible for the successful implementation of their Pathway Planning.
- 2.4 A young person is *eligible* for leaving care support when:
- they are 16 years old (or older, if they came into care aged 16-17) **and**
 - they have been in care for a total of 13 weeks, since being 14 ([19B, Schedule 2, Children \(Leaving Care\) Act, 2000](#)).
 - this includes children who are in both regulated placements and other accommodation where the local authority was central in arranging their care.
- 2.5 All eligible young people must have their needs assessed and a Pathway Plan completed within 3 months of becoming eligible (regulation 44/45, Schedule 8, respectively). The Government states that local authorities should provide their

care leavers with the same level of care and support that their peers would expect from a reasonable parent.

- 2.6 WCC are committed to providing young people with individual tailored support, which is of a high quality and provides the opportunities needed to help them move successfully to adulthood. These goals are planned and overseen through their Pathway Plan.
- 2.7 This support is coordinated through regular visits to develop a meaningful relationship and is responsive to the needs of the young person. This must be at least the statutory required frequency and consider all the monitoring requirements outlined in the care planning regulations. The worker will also maintain other contacts, e.g. text, phone calls to provide the support that is needed.
- 2.8 If the young person is an unaccompanied asylum seeker, then a triple plan is required, by considering their current discretionary leave; whether their appeal rights are exhausted, voluntary return to their country of origin, and the possibility of permanency within the UK.
- 2.9 If the young person is allocated a social worker from the SEND Social Care Team then a personal advisor is allocated to support pathway planning and any transition to adult social care. The leaving care team must ensure the completion of the planning. This needs to be a person-centred bespoke approach that promotes consistency of the ongoing support network whilst ensuring that the young person receives their entitlements under the [Leaving Care Act, 2000](#). This is recorded and reviewed within the Pathway Plan, but unified with other transitional reviews. For further details see [Care Act 2014 – Transitions Guidance for Staff on Process and Roles and Responsibilities](#).
- 2.10 When young people are allocated to a social worker in the Youth Justice Service, in order to promote preparation for adulthood they are allocated a personal advisor to ensure that pathway planning occurs. This is achieved alongside the existing support network and compliments the ongoing work around offending. For further details see [Warwickshire Youth Justice Service – Protocol for Joint Working](#).

3. The Pathway Planning process:

- 3.1 The young person should be central to this plan. It is their life and the pathway planning documents have been produced in consultation with care leavers. These consist of:
 - A self-assessment tool for young people (if they wish to complete this tool);
 - A young person's Pathway Report completed prior to each review;
 - Reviews to consider the appropriateness of their pathway plan.

- 3.2 The allocated worker must take all reasonable steps to ensure that the young person fully participates in the pathway planning process as this makes it more effective. In practice, this means that consideration should be given to paying reasonable travel or subsistence costs to support attending meetings. The allocated worker must take full account of any communication or cognitive difficulties to ensure that the young person can engage in the process. The young person should be offered a secure means of keeping their documents as they move towards independence.

4. The young person's self-assessment tool:

- 4.1 To support their engagement, the young person can complete a short form known as [How Ready Am I?](#) This can be done alone, with their carer, allocated worker, personal advisor, friends or any other support person. It can be completed as often as they like and it should be reviewed to explore their changing needs.

5. The Pathway Plan (including their needs assessment & Pathway Plan):

- 5.1 The Pathway Plan must be completed within 3 months of *eligibility*. It should be started at 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ years if the young person is on a Care Order or when they become eligible (if later). The plan should include significant historical information from previous plans and incorporates their care plan. The pathway plan can then become the central planning process into adulthood. It is particularly important to facilitate continuity of information when transferring from children's teams.
- 5.2 The process of pathway planning should be completed as ongoing conversations with the young person and their support network. This must represent the views of the young person, and other significant people. The worker must discuss with the young person about who should be consulted, and seek consent to do so. The worker should also seek, where practical and appropriate, the views of the young person's:
- family;
 - foster carers or accommodation provider;
 - independent reviewing officer (IRO),
 - personal advisor;
 - any health professional (including dentist);
 - any designated teacher or education professionals;
 - any Independent Visitor;
 - and anyone else significant to the young person.

- 5.3 There is a specific consent form on the young person's case record to document consent. The worker will take account of the young person's wishes, but must also balance these against the effectiveness of the planning.
- 5.4 This pathway planning process considers the young person holistic needs, both now and in the longer term. The process includes discussions about their career, health and wellbeing, friends and family, where they live, and their finances. It is an assessment process to gather information and to identify what support is required throughout the authority's involvement. Each section concludes with a summary plan of future support needs, including timescales and who is responsible for the actions. These plans need to be specific, measureable, aspirational, and realistic with agreed timescales (SMART). These plans are then combined together to become My Action Plan which must be offered to the young person after each review.
- 5.5 Pathway Plans need to anticipate that things may not always go to plan. All young people need the opportunity to make mistakes, support to learn from them and feel reassured that they are entitled for more support if needed. Pathway Plans must include contingency arrangements and be clear about further support if things don't go to plan.
- 5.6 The Pathway Plan is an agreement between the young person and Warwickshire County Council. It must be signed by the worker. The young person should be encouraged to sign the plan, and be offered a copy of their pathway report and action plan. If they do not wish to have a copy, then this should be recorded on the report. If the person is unable to understand the process or the paperwork, then this should be made clear within the pathway plan. A person with parental responsibility, next of kin, an independent advocate or another worker can sign the plan to endorse that this is in the young person's best interests.
- 5.7 A copy of the report, or specific sections, should be provided to the contributors with the young person's agreement. This ensures that everyone can provide the appropriate support. It is the social worker or personal advisor's responsibility to ensure that all the agreed tasks have been completed.
- 5.8 If the young person does not comply with their Pathway Plan then consideration should be given to re-negotiation of the plan to promote their compliance. If this persists then the Pathway Plan can incorporate sanctions for non-compliance, including the withholding of *discretionary* financial support until they engage with essential support.

6 Pathway plan reviews

- 6.1 It is a requirement that the young person has statutory reviews of their Pathway Plan at least every 6 months. The allocated worker should complete

a “My Pathway Plan” report prior to the meeting, which is authorised by their manager. This is supported with a My Action Plan document.

- 6.2 Young people should be encouraged to participate in all their reviews, including chairing these meetings if appropriate. The worker and the young person will discuss who could attend this meeting, but it is the responsibility of the worker to ensure that an effective plan is produced. This may mean that other people contribute without attending meetings.

7 Pathway plan reviews for children/young people in care

- 7.1 The IRO continues to chair the reviews of children in care until they are 18 years old, and these meetings consider the proposed pathway planning process. The allocated work **must** ensure that these documents are available for the IRO at least 2 days before the review:
- The completed My Pathway Plan report;
 - The social worker’s report to the child in care review;
 - The Placement Plan (in all placements, completing the relevant section);
 - The Personal Educational Plan (PEP);
 - The health assessment report;
- 7.2 At the end of the meeting, the IRO will consider the suitability of the pathway planning and clearly summarise the agreed Pathway Plan (including actions required and timescales). The allocated worker will ensure that any changes to the agreed plan are added to the next pathway plan as soon as possible.
- 7.3 IROs will send the minutes of the review to the allocated worker to distribute them.
- 7.4 These reviews must occur within 20 days of when they became looked after, then after 3 months, and then at least 6 monthly.
- 7.5 The regulations require the local authority to arrange a review:
- when a move from a regulated placement is being considered or is likely;
 - where there is a proposal to move from a residential placement that was previously considered appropriate, and the young person is settled and in education;
 - prior to being discharged from a secure children’s home or custody;
 - whenever an unplanned change of accommodation would disrupt their education;

- as soon as possible after 28 days of moving to new accommodation;
- if significant changes in circumstances, (i.e. moving out of area, being evicted, asylum status changes)
- if requested to do so by the young person/adult;
- if the local authority, or the personal advisor considers it necessary;
- otherwise, at intervals of no more than 6 months.

8. Specific circumstances

8.1 If the young person is returning to someone with parental responsibility:

- A single assessment must also be completed to fully consider the support needed by the young person and the family for this to be successful. This must include the young person's needs, parental capacity, wider family and environmental factors.
- If the young person is on a Care Order then placement with parent's regulations must be followed.
- A further review will be convened by the IRO at 6 months, if it is successful, then the young person is no longer considered 'relevant' and pathway planning ceases. However they become a 'qualifier' and so can return for advice and assistance. If the arrangement breaks down they return to being 'relevant' and the pathway planning process recommences.

8.2 If the young person is considering moving into an unregulated placement:

- The Placement Plan must be completed about the suitability of this accommodation in a planned way to ensure it is safe and appropriate;
- The views of their parents and current carer should be sought;
- The young person should be provided with contact details of the allocated worker, personal advisor, other support people, and Emergency Duty Team (EDT) when they move;
- The Pathway Plan should explore support needs and ensure that the young person is ready to move into more independent accommodation, clearly identifying ongoing support needs and how these will be met;
- The young person should be visited at the accommodation within 7 days by their allocated worker. This is a new placement so statutory visits are required on a 6 weekly basis, but ongoing contact should be far more frequent to support this transition.

8.2 If the review is responding to the young person becoming a parent:

- As this is likely to cause a significant change in their circumstances, the allocated worker will update their pathway plan within 3 months of becoming aware of the expected child. This is to explore the young person's current situation, their parenting knowledge, their support network and identify likely skills/difficulties.
- A referral should be made to the Family Nurse Practitioner by the 12th week.
- If there seem to be unmet parenting needs identified during this assessment process, then a referral to the young person's local children's team should be discussed with the young person to consider extra support. If there are safeguarding concerns about the baby, then an immediate referral must be made by the leaving care worker to the locality team for them to assess the needs of the unborn baby/child.

8.2.1 There should not be any significant changes in the plan for the young person between reviews. The IRO should be informed of any of the following:

- if there are any significant changes in contact;
- changes in family relations;
- changes in contact arrangements;
- exclusions from school;
- missing from an approved placement;
- significant illnesses/accidents;
- criminal processes;
- complaints from or on behalf of the child, parent or carer.

8.2.2 The IRO must be informed immediately if there are any significant changes in the placement for example:

- a proposal to move during key stage 4;
- a move from a settled placement;
- a move which affects their education;
- a move into independent accommodation (unregulated placement);
- for the young person to leave care before they are 18 years of age.

8.2.3 If there is a plan to make any of these changes then the allocated social worker must contact the IRO and discuss the planning further. The IRO will decide whether it is required or practicable for the review to be brought forward.

8.2.4 If a child is over the age of 5 and has been in care for over a year, then a proportion of their allowances are saved to support them when they leave care. This money is transferred to an ISA account in their name. However once the young person reaches 16 years of age, the long term savings can be used to

support their pathway planning. Young people can then be more actively engaged in considering their savings and planning for appropriate expenditure to support their current plan. Young people need to be encouraged to learn budgeting skills through mistakes, but this is not to override their wellbeing and future requirements.

8.2.5 At the final LAC review, it will be discussed whether the savings are to be transferred to a further ISA at 18 years of age. The team may continue to manage the savings to support pathway planning or cash is given to the young person. This must be assessed on an individual basis, based on their needs and capacity to manage sums of money.

8.2.6 When the formal involvement with the young adult has ceased any remaining long term savings should be transferred to their bank account.

8.3 Pathway Plan Reviews for young adults (Over 18s):

8.3.1 Once the young person is 18 then the pathway plan review will be chaired by a social worker or team manager. This review meeting is recorded on the *"Report of the Pathway Planning Reviews for 18+"* within their case file.

8.3.2 The worker is required to make every effort to secure the attendance of young people in their reviews. However occasionally this is impossible. If this is so, then the review should go ahead, with the best possible involvement of the young person. The Pathway Plan should be changed (if needed), and a discussion occur with the young person. A copy of My Action Plan should be given to the young person and the attendants (as appropriate).

8.3.3 During the review meeting each aspect of the pathway plan should be discussed, considering the acceptability of the plans, the views of all significant people involved and whether there is sufficient support to help the young person to achieve these plans.

8.3.4 At the end of this discussion the proposed plans are either agreed or changed depending on the agreed actions needed. This may mean minor changes, parts being removed, new things are added, or other contingency plans being added.

8.3.5 This final agreed pathway plan must be attached to the minutes of the meeting and distributed to all the relevant people.

8.3.6 If there are significant changes in circumstances then consideration should be given to an earlier review of the Pathway Plan and convening a meeting to ensure that the appropriate support is in place.

- 8.3.7 The overall responsibility for the completion of a Pathway Plan and review lies with the team manager, overseen by their operations manager. All young people should be offered a copy of their agreed Pathway Plan, within 2 weeks of the review.
- 8.3.8 As the pathway planning process continues the worker will gradually be supporting the young person to engage with universal or community services as adults. If they are not intending to continue in an agreed programme of education or training, the pathway planning process should be gradually brought to a completion around the time that the young person becomes 21 years old. If they are continuing in some form of education or training, or wish to do so, the pathway planning process can continue. This means regular contact (at a negotiated frequency), reviews of their pathway plan (at an agreed frequency) and a personal advisor. This continues until the young person reaches 25 or the completion of their agreed programme of study (see separate procedure on [Promoting Education, Employment and Training](#)). The young person should be advised of this in their Pathway Plan Reviews.
- 8.3.9 The local authority is committed to supporting young people, and understand that sometimes they have chaotic lifestyles which may prevent regular contact occurring. The allocated worker should strive to provide flexible and responsive services to minimise young people disengaging from support. However, if a former relevant person does refuse, support cannot be imposed upon them. Ideally the allocated worker will have this in a signed document from the young adult, including updating the consent form that they refuse to consent to information sharing. The young person must be informed that they can return for support at any time and be encouraged to do so. If this does occur, then the team manager should review this on a 6 monthly basis to consider that this is still appropriate.
- 8.3.10 If the authority has continued to manage the long term savings for the young adult, then each review should consider if they now have the capacity to manage this sum of money, being clear of any welfare or safeguarding concerns that continue. When formal involvement with the young adult ceases, then any remaining long term savings should be transferred to the young person's bank account wherever possible.

9. Qualifiers – supporting their independence

- 9.1 There are also young people who were eligible for pathway planning but have returned to the care of their parents for more than 6 months. As such, they are no longer considered “former relevant” under the Leaving Care Act. They

are entitled to some ongoing support, and this is referred to as a “qualifier” under leaving care legislation.

- 9.2 “Qualifiers” are entitled to an assessment and some ongoing support and guidance. Once a request for support has been received then a [single assessment](#) will be undertaken for young people aged under 18. If a team manager agrees that on-going support is required then the allocated worker should formalise this through the child in need process. Once the young person reaches their 18th birthday, this transfers to an *Independence Plan for Qualifiers*. Qualifiers are NOT subject to the pathway planning processes or specified frequencies of contact or reviews. Instead this is to be agreed within the Independence Plan. This can be completed by an unqualified worker but must be endorsed by a team manager. This will continued to be reviewed at least 6 monthly.
- 9.3 The local authority will keep in contact with young adults over 18 years old by informing them of their entitlements on an annual basis. If an adult requests an assessment then the worker must complete an adult contact within the social care system and then complete an *Independence Plan for Qualifiers* within 3 months of their initial request.

10. Quality Assurance

- 10.1 WCC welcome feedback from the young person/adult and support network about their pathway planning process. This occurs through observations of visits made to the young person/adult and also through independent conversations with the young person/adult.
- 10.2 IROs chair and monitor the effectiveness of pathway planning until the young person/adult reaches 18 years of age. The IRO will contact the team manager if they have any concerns about the pathway planning process. The documentation for the review requires the approval of the team manager. There is also a formal escalation procedure with the IRO sending a RAG rating to the operations manager or service manager if there is none-compliance.
- 10.3 Team managers observe the practice of social workers and personal advisors on a regular basis. During monthly supervision the allocated worker will explore the details of the service provision, reflecting upon the views of the young person, the quality of support provided and the effectiveness. Critical reflection and curiosity is used to explore the range of support available. The team manager will regularly chair the Pathway Plan reviews, ensuring that they receive feedback about the progression of the pathway plan from the young person and other involved people.

- 10.4 Audits will also be completed by managers to ensure that actions outlined within the Pathway Plan review are being implemented. Reports to monitor the timeliness of care leaver contacts and pathway plans will be developed in MOSAIC. This can be incorporated into an annual review of the timeliness and quality of pathway plans.

11. Further Information

[Leaving Care Intranet Pages](#)

[Single Assessment Guidance and Procedures](#)