

Help & Housing for Care Leavers

If you are a care leaver you may be able to get help with your housing from Chichester Council. The help available will likely depend on your age.

The Council provides a range of service for people who need help with their housing through the Housing Advice Team which is based at East Pallant House in Chichester. You can also contact the Housing Advice Team by email or telephone. Contact details are available on the Council's website.

What are the common concerns of care leavers at different stages?

- 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?

More information can be found through West Sussex County Council's Leaving Care website at <https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/education-children-and-families/your-space/life/leaving-care/>.

Who is a Care Leaver?

The definition of who is a Care Leaver can often be confusing. Broadly speaking, a Care Leaver 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.

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. There might be additional services available to you if you were accommodated for less than 13 weeks.

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 should have a Personal Adviser (PA) who can provide on-going support. If you do not have one contact the Childrens Services department.

Who might owe additional duties and services?

It will usually be the Childrens 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 has will be required to assess any additional duties 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 Childrens Services and 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 childrens 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 every district and borough within West Sussex.

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

Housing

If:

- You have already left care, and
- You have spent a total of at least 13 weeks in care since the age of 14, and
- Part of that time in care was while you were 16 or 17,

You will be able to get help (including emergency accommodation if you are homeless) with your housing from Chichester Council's Housing Advice Team. It doesn't matter where you were in care or if the 13 weeks were not all at the same time.

If you are not yet 16 or you have not been in care for 13 weeks as described you should discuss your housing options with your social worker.

Financial Support

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 or illness.

For more information contact your Personal Adviser.

18 to 21 year old Care Leavers

Housing

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 Council should help you find a place to live. Childrens' Services can also help by providing support.

If you are in full-time further or higher education Childrens Services must find you somewhere to live during holiday periods if you need it.

Financial Support

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.

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)

21+ year old Care Leavers

Housing

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 full-time further or higher education Childrens Services might find you somewhere to live during holiday periods if you need it.

Financial Support

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.

What help can we give you and what will you need to provide?

Chichester District Council provides a housing advice drop-in service throughout the week. We can also provide advice and assistance to anyone who is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Housing Options Interview

You will receive a Housing Options Interview to discuss your current circumstances with a Housing Advice Officer. You will be asked a range of questions and we will establish whether there is a duty to provide you, and anyone expected to live with you, with temporary accommodation until you can find somewhere more settled to live.

To be entitled to emergency accommodation you would normally need to be:

- 'Homeless';
- eligible for assistance in the UK; and
- you or someone in your household must have a priority need.

If seeking assistance with your housing from Chichester DC we would typically ask you to provide:

- Photo ID (preferably passport or drivers licence).
- Proof of your full current income (pay slips of benefit award letters).
- 2 months' bank statements.
- Documents relating to you current (or most recent) accommodation and reasons for leaving.
- Details of your time in care (including an address history, any Pathway Plan and your Personal Adviser).

This will enable the Council to fully assess your housing needs, appropriately advise you on your housing options and help determine reasonable steps to help resolve your housing issues. These will be sent to you in writing.

What other information might you need to know?

Personal Adviser

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

What is a "Local Connection"?

This term has different meanings for different services. You might need to have a Local Connection to be owed a duty to help you secure accommodation or to be eligible for a housing register.

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 refer you to a Council where you have a local connection. If you have been placed in care in Chichester then you will likely have a local connection. However, this may be dependent on your address history.

Local connection in terms of eligibility for the housing register will vary between Councils. Click here for more information about the eligibility criteria for the housing register in Chichester ("Homemove"), <http://www.chichester.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=25983&p=0>.

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: <http://www.chichester.gov.uk/findoutaboutbenefit>.

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 (typically around £73 per week in Chichester). 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 One Bedroom rate (typically around £580 per calendar month).

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.

Housing Register

Chichester District Council operates a Housing Register called 'Homemove'. You can make an online application to Homemove through the Chichester District Council website at www.chichestrr.gov.uk.

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.

Supported Housing

There are some supported housing schemes in Chichester which are accessible through the housing register and provided by Southdown Housing. To be considered for one of these schemes you will have to seek advice from a Housing Advice Officer through the drop-in service at the Council's offices in Chichester. You will have to meet some basic eligibility criteria.

If accepted, you will have to complete pre-tenancy work and continue to pro-actively engage with the support available for up to two years. This is designed to assist you in building all the skills you need to sustain independent living.

Private Rental assistance

The Council runs a rent in advance and deposit bond scheme for eligible applicant 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 around £10.00 per 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.

Former Asylum Seekers

If you came to the UK as an unaccompanied child seeking asylum and were provided with services as a result but are now threatened with homelessness because those services to you have ended you should contact the Council where you live directly for specific advice on your options.

Who else can help you?

There are a range of third party services available to help Care Leavers from legal advice to assistance with housing.

West Sussex County Council (WSSC) – if you have left WSSC care you will be entitled to on-going advice and support potentially 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 DC offices at East Pallant House, Chichester PO19 1TY.

Shelter – provides advisory services to those with a housing need. Shelter's 24-hour helpline phone number is 0808 800 4444.