

Advice for Care Leavers

This factsheet is for young people leaving the care of Kent County Council, or Medway Council, who need housing advice.

This factsheet contains information on support that is available to you, and ideas for finding somewhere to live. If you are a young person aged under 18 but you have not been in care, ask for our factsheet for 16-17s instead.

Children's Social Services

Children's Social Services will help care leavers to prepare for becoming an adult and developing their independence. You will be entitled to this support up to the age of 21 (or longer, if you are in full-time education), if you have been 'Looked After' for 13 weeks from the age of 14, and for at least a day following your 16th birthday. This makes you a 'Relevant Child'. You have different rights if you have spent less than a total of 13 weeks in care, or if you want to leave care before your 16th birthday.

Move-on accommodation can be secured in many forms such as supported accommodation, shared houses, studios or flats, private renting, social renting, or student accommodation if you intend to go on to University. It is important that you are proactively planning before any support you receive from Social Services comes to end.

Children's Social Care in Medway is on 01634 33466 (01634 304400 in an emergency), or email ss.accessandinfo@medway.gov.uk. For the rest of Kent, telephone 03000 41 11 11, or email social.services@kent.gov.uk.

Staying Put

Young people in foster care can be allowed to remain with their foster carers when they reach 18 years old, if it is in everyone's best interests, and the foster carer agrees. This option should be discussed with you at the first review after your 16th birthday. If it isn't, ask your worker about it. You could stay put until your 21st birthday, but you may feel you are ready to move on before that. This will be discussed at your pathway planning meetings with your worker, which should take place every 6 months.

Young Lives Foundation Advocacy

If you need someone independent to advocate for you, contact **Young Lives Foundation** in Maidstone on 01622 693459, or at enquiries@ylf.org.uk.

Getting on the housing register

Affordable housing is in very short supply in Kent, and it often takes a very long time on the housing register to qualify for an offer of housing. If you want to apply, go to <https://www.kenthomechoice.org.uk/choice/login.aspx>. If the council placed you in care outside of the district, you will still have a 'local connection' to the council who placed you – so if you were placed by Medway, you can apply to Medway, and if you were placed by Kent County Council, you can apply to any other local authority in Kent. Kent local housing authorities are listed overleaf. If you have lived outside the area for 2 years or more, you would also have a local connection to the area you were placed in and could apply there too.

Some local authorities will give additional priority to care leavers aged between 18 and 21 years old or will have nomination arrangements with Children's Social Services. Ask the council you want to apply to about their allocations policy.

There is a 'Joint Protocol' in place in Kent – this is an agreement between Kent County Council and the local councils, about how care leavers should be helped. You can read it at <https://www.kenthousinggroup.org.uk/strategies-protocols/>

Private renting

This is likely to be your fastest route into independent housing. You may be eligible for help with housing costs through housing benefit (or in the calculation of your Universal Credit) - depending on your income. Usually if you are aged between 18 and 35 and you rent from a private landlord, the maximum housing benefit you can get is the same rate you would get for renting a single room in a shared house. But if you've been in care, this doesn't apply until you turn 22. There's a very useful website about benefits and care leavers here:

[https://www.turn2us.org.uk/Your-Situation/a-young-person-\(aged-16-17\)/Young-People-and-benefits/Care-leavers.](https://www.turn2us.org.uk/Your-Situation/a-young-person-(aged-16-17)/Young-People-and-benefits/Care-leavers.)

Private landlords usually require a substantial deposit and the first month's rent in advance. Many councils offer help by offering loans or 'rent deposit guarantees'. Ask the council you want to apply to about this.

Homeless or threatened with homelessness?

If you are leaving care, you should be supported to find suitable accommodation. However, if you think you will be made homeless in the next 56 days, and you cannot find your own alternative accommodation (despite the help of the agencies supporting you), you can approach any local housing authority in England, and ask for assistance. Provided you are eligible, the council will assess your needs, and draw up a plan to help you resolve your housing problem.

If you become homeless and the council you approach are satisfied that you are eligible, and do not have accommodation anywhere that you have a right to occupy and can gain access to, they will try to help you resolve your homelessness. They would decide if you are more vulnerable than an ordinary person - and may decide you are in a priority need group (as a result of being a care leaver). If this is the case, they will provide you with suitable temporary accommodation, while they help you to find a more permanent solution. Whether you are vulnerable or not, the council will try and relieve your homelessness for a period of 56 days. If they are unable to help you find a home during this 'relief period', and you are in priority need (and have co-operated with the council), they may then make you a direct offer of housing.

Contacting your local Council

Ashford: <https://www.ashford.gov.uk>

Canterbury: <https://www.canterbury.gov.uk>

Dartford: <https://www.dartford.gov.uk>

Dover: <https://www.dover.gov.uk>

Gravesham: <http://www.gravesham.gov.uk>

Maidstone: <https://self.maidstone.gov.uk>

Medway: <https://www.medway.gov.uk>

Sevenoaks: <https://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk>

Folkestone & Hythe: <https://www.shepway.gov.uk>

Swale: <https://www.swale.gov.uk>

Thanet: <https://www.thanet.gov.uk>

Tunbridge Wells: <http://www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk>

Tonbridge & Malling: <https://www.tmbc.gov.uk>