

21Plus Service

*Extended Personal Advisor Support
for Care Leavers aged 21 – 24 years*

Policy and Practice Guidance

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

As of April 2018, Nottinghamshire Social Care have a duty to offer Personal Advisor support to all care leavers towards whom the local authority had duties under section 23C of the Children Act 1989, irrespective of whether they are engaged in education or training. This policy has been developed with consideration of the Children Act (1989), Children (Leaving Care) Act (2000), Children and Social Work Act (2017) and the Department for Education (DfE) guidance on '*extending personal adviser support to all care leavers to age 25*' (Feb 2018).

As part of Nottinghamshire Social Care's duty to these care leavers aged between 21 years and 24 years, we shall have regard to the seven *corporate parenting principles* (DfE, Feb 2018) that assist in guiding our services to children in care and care leavers.

1.1 CORPORATE PARENTING PRINCIPLES

Nottinghamshire Social Care recognise that in order to thrive, children and young people have certain key needs that good parents generally meet. The corporate parenting principles set out seven principles that local authorities must have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and young people. These are:

- to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people
- to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
- to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
- to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
- to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
- for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
- to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

As part of the offer to care leavers, Nottinghamshire Social Care will also have regard to these seven principles when identifying needs and support that can be offered.

It is important to note that the corporate parenting principles apply to the whole of Nottinghamshire County Council and not just children's services departments. This will be particularly important for local authority departments such as housing services. Due to Nottinghamshire's geographical and political establishment, this means that there is a need for Nottinghamshire County Council and the seven District Councils within Nottinghamshire to work together, as well as other organisations to try and achieve positive outcomes and responses to needs that 21plus care leavers are identifying. This is being achieved within our multi-agency approach towards the Care Leaver Offer in Nottinghamshire.

For more information on the Care Leaver Offer then visit:

<https://www.nottshelpyourself.org.uk/kb5/nottinghamshire/directory/landing.page?newdirectorychannel=12>

2.0 21PLUS CARE LEAVER SUPPORT

There is no assumption within the new legislation and guidance that all care leavers aged 21 – 24 years of age will require or request support from Nottinghamshire Social Care. It is also recognised within the guidance, that although young people will have varying needs depending on their personal circumstances, that the

expectation is that support and services will taper away over time, in recognition of the young person's growing maturity and need for independence.

However, if Nottinghamshire Social Care are approached by a former Nottinghamshire County Council care leaver who is aged 21 – 24 years old at the time of contact, then there is a duty to proportionately assess their needs and, in some complex circumstances, develop and review their Pathway Plan. This will not be at the same level of support for those care leavers aged 18 – 20 years, but will be more as a positive response to a request from a Nottinghamshire care leaver who may be experiencing some issues with their transition into independence and adult life and require some targeted and short-term additional support, advice and/or guidance. Nottinghamshire Social Care will locate this support within their current Leaving Care Service and identify it being called the **21Plus Service**.

Nottinghamshire Social Care's 21Plus Service will be in the form of support, advice and guidance offered to Nottinghamshire care leavers when requested. In all cases, the needs of the care leaver will be identified by the 21Plus Personal Advisor who will act Countywide in response to offering support, advice and/or guidance.

2.1 GENERAL PRINCIPALS OF TRANSFER TO 21PLUS CARE LEAVER SUPPORT

If a Nottinghamshire care leaver is receiving support from the Leaving Care Service prior to their 21st birthday and there are short-term ongoing needs identified, then the care leaver will remain open to their Personal Advisor for up to six months past their 21st birthday in order for those needs to be addressed. This is to try and ensure some consistency of Personal Advisor for the young person. However, if after six months of continuing support, there are identified complex needs that would require ongoing support from a Personal Advisor then a Pathway Plan review should be undertaken with an invite to the 21Plus Service to attend as part of a transfer to the 21Plus Service. Any requests for transfer should be sent to the 21Plus Service via 21Plus@nottsc.gov.uk

There should be at least a joint visit by the Leaving Care Personal Advisor and the 21Plus Personal Advisor to meet the young person, to identify needs from the Pathway Plan and agree upon the time-frame of support from the 21Plus Service.

If the needs are primarily around Higher/Further Education and linked with financial support from the Leaving Care team in respect of this, then it is expected that either the Leaving Care Personal Advisor or 18+ Achievement Advisor will remain involved around that specific support, as opposed to transfer to the 21Plus Service. In all cases, the care leaver will need to be requesting that they wish for continued support for there to be consideration of involvement by the 21Plus Service.

If there is a specific identified need for the young person to remain open to their allocated Personal Advisor within the Leaving Care Team, then this can be discussed and agreed with the relevant Leaving Care Team Manager and/or Children's Service Manager.

2.2 21PLUS CARE LEAVER REQUESTS FOR SUPPORT

If a Nottinghamshire care leaver is aged between 21 – 24 years old, is requesting support, advice and/or guidance, then they should contact the 21Plus Service Duty Phone on 0115 804 4154 or email 21Plus@nottsc.gov.uk. There may be times that a young person will contact their former Personal Advisor in the Leaving Care Team or seek advice and guidance from them. In these circumstances, if the Personal Advisor can assist, then they should, and this assistance should be notified to the 21Plus Service on

21Plus@nottsc.gov.uk. If however, there are levels of complexity or the Personal Advisor is unable to respond accordingly, then information should be taken from the young person including contact details and this should be sent to 21Plus@nottsc.gov.uk for the 21Plus Service to respond. Alternatively, the young person can be directed to the 21Plus Service Duty Phone on 0115 804 4154.

A MASH Enquiry will be completed for all 21Plus Service requests. If advice and guidance over the telephone can be issued to support the young person, which meets their identified needs/request, then this should be offered and the MASH Enquiry closed. However, if the needs identified within the MASH enquiry require more intensive support and response from Nottinghamshire Social Care then the MASH Enquiry will progress to the 21Plus Service to make further contact with that young person and identify what support may be required, which may include a review of part or all of their Pathway Plan depending on the complexities of need.

Referrals from other agencies and organisations **cannot** be accepted in respect of requests for support for Nottinghamshire care leaver aged between 21 – 24 years old, unless there is written consent from the young person, clearly demonstrating that they are requesting support, advice and/or guidance and the agency/organisation is acting specifically on their behalf. However, if there are concerns being shared in respect of a young person who is entitled to support from the 21Plus Service, then attempts to contact that young person to inform them that support is available if they require it will be attempted by the 21Plus Service.

2.3 21PLUS CARE LEAVERS WITH CHILDREN OPEN TO SOCIAL CARE

There will be occasions when parent(s) of children who are currently open to involvement with Social Care are identified as being Nottinghamshire care leavers and entitled to access the 21Plus Service. In these instances, the 21Plus Service will be able to offer support, advice and guidance to the parent(s) who is identified as the care leaver (if they wish to access this). However, the main responsibility and involvement of Social Care remains with the Department to which the children have a linked Social Worker or professional. Therefore, provision of accommodation, income and/or other financial support under either the Children Act 1989 (within Child Protection, Child in Need etc.) or other legislation including No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) status will be responsibility of the team linked with the child(ren)'s Social Worker and not the 21Plus Service.

3.0 21PLUS SERVICE AND THE LOCAL CARE LEAVER OFFER

As part of our commitment to care leavers in Nottinghamshire, we have included care leavers up until the age of 25 years within our local Care Leaver Offer. For further information about the Care Leaver Offer and what benefits and entitlements this identifies for care leavers then visit:

<https://www.nottshelpyourself.org.uk/kb5/nottinghamshire/directory/landing.page?newdirectorychannel=12>

3.1 IDENTIFYING NEED(S) AND PATHWAY PLANNING

The 21Plus Personal Advisor and the care leaver will together identify the need(s) that the young person is wishing to receive support, advice and guidance for and try to agree a proportionate action plan including a clear timescale in which the support plan will be completed or reviewed. It is expected that most of the support from the 21Plus Personal Advisor will be short-term and issue-specific and therefore longer-term pathway planning and reviews will not be required. However, if a care leaver is presenting with complex needs which would require a part or full Pathway Plan to be completed, then this should be reviewed every six months.

The 21Plus Personal Advisor will complete a proportionate and specific record of what need(s) have been identified and the plan of support by the 21Plus Service and this will be recorded on the information technology system used by Nottinghamshire Social Care. If a Pathway Plan is part or fully completed with the care leaver, then they will receive a copy of this from the 21Plus Personal Advisor.

3.2 FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The new duty requires Nottinghamshire Social Care to provide advice and support to any care leaver aged 21 years, up to their 25th birthday. There are no additional duties on Nottinghamshire Social Care in relation to financial support (i.e. accommodating care leavers in temporary housing, additional support around benefits or debt payments). Any support and duties already provided or placed on Local Authority Departments, such as Housing, or Adult Social Care, should therefore continue to be provided and funded by the relevant Government Department, Local Authority Department or District Council.

There may be times when temporary, discretionary financial support is required for those accessing the 21Plus service. Any financial support requests will be considered on an individual basis and be relevant to the needs that have been identified resulting in the involvement of the 21Plus Service.

3.3 HOMELESSNESS / HOUSING NEEDS

There is no new duty requirements for Nottinghamshire Social Care to fund accommodation costs for emergency housing if a Nottinghamshire care leaver identifies as being homeless. The current legislation remains in respect of Homelessness and it would be expected for the Nottinghamshire care leaver to present to their appropriate District/Borough Council with the duty to assess their homelessness/housing needs. Nottinghamshire County Council are committed to working together with our partners to try and avoid former care leavers experiencing street homelessness. Therefore, as part of the Nottinghamshire Care Leaver Offer, if a Nottinghamshire care leaver aged 21 – 24 years presents as homeless, then the 21Plus Service will assist with advocating, signposting and will help with applying for (but not funding) temporary and/or emergency accommodation.

If a 21Plus care leaver is offered housing by a District/Borough Council Housing and Homelessness Department(s) and requires additional support to maintain their tenancy or around their transition into independent living, then a referral can be made for Floating Support from our Supported Accommodation Providers by the 21Plus Personal Advisor completing the relevant A1 referral form.

3.3.1 HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION PERSONAL ADVISOR

In 2018, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) issued temporary grant funding to Nottinghamshire County Council as part of their Rough Sleeping initiative. This funding initially until March 2020 is providing a Homelessness Prevention Personal Advisor to focus support and prevention work with care leavers at risk of and experiencing street homelessness. Referrals for support and consultation can be made via 21Plus@nottsc.gov.uk

3.4 HOME ESTABLISHMENT GRANT (HEG)

Attempts should be made to identify all the relevant needs of care leavers and access to their Home Establishment Grant (HEG) prior to their 21st birthday and details of this should be in their Pathway Plan. If

there is unspent HEG specific to that care leaver, then a discretionary payment can be considered by the 21Plus Service in relation to goods/services that would usually be paid for from the HEG if this need is identified as part of the 21Plus support.

3.5 EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Plans for continuing education and training should be identified prior to the care leavers' 21st birthday and should be within their Pathway Plan. If the needs are primarily around Higher/Further Education and linked with financial support from the Leaving Care team in respect of this, then it is expected that either the Leaving Care Personal Advisor or 18+ Achievement Advisor will remain involved around that specific support, as opposed to transfer to the 21Plus Service. In all cases, the care leaver will need to be requesting that they wish for continued support for there to be consideration of involvement by the 21Plus Service.

If the Nottinghamshire care leaver is aged 21 – 24 years old and closed to the Leaving Care Team and refers themselves for support to the 21Plus Service in relation to education, training and/or employment then support will be considered as part of their needs being identified. There is no duty requirements for Nottinghamshire Social Care to fund new education, training or employment support costs as part of the 21Plus Service. However, an Employment, Education and Training Assessment will be completed with the care leaver in respect of their support request by an Achievement Advisor linked to the 21Plus Service. Any decisions around support (both practically and financially) will be in line with the current Leaving Care PPG and legislation.

If the request for support would enable continuing education attainment, continuation of a training opportunity to be successfully maintained/completed, or by offering temporary support then employment would be maintained or secured, then there can be consideration of one-off individual financial support by the 21Plus Service. This is identified as being most likely around cost of a specific licence in order to attain employment or specialist equipment which is required to be provided by the employee.

3.6 21PLUS CARE LEAVERS IN CUSTODY

There will be occasions when Nottinghamshire care leavers are in custody when they reach their 21st birthday. It is expected that the last Pathway Plan completed by their Leaving Care Personal Advisor prior to their 21st birthday will identify if there are any ongoing support needs and then consider whether a transfer to the 21Plus Service is required (see 2.1).

If a Nottinghamshire care leaver is no longer open to the Leaving Care team and is eligible for the 21Plus Service, then a referral can be made to Nottinghamshire Social Care via our referral process. If this is being completed by the Prison Service or another support worker on the care leavers' behalf, then there should be signed consent by the Care Leaver included within the referral.

It is expected that the prison's Care Leaver Champion is aware of the young person in their custody and works together with the 21Plus Service to help develop and plan around accommodation and support upon their release. Accommodation options and support will be approached within a multi-agency context and care leavers leaving custody prior to their 25th birthday will be entitled to services identified within the local Care Leaver Offer (see 3.0).

The 21Plus Service does not have a duty to offer financial support to care leavers in custody in relation to purchasing basic goods, food items, or supporting payments to enable contact with friends/family. However, individual circumstances will be considered around requests for financial support.

If the care leaver is being released from custody after their 25th birthday, then they will not be eligible for support, advice and/or guidance from the 21Plus Service upon their release. However, we will direct any care leaver to appropriate support services and advise on actions that they should and can take.

3.7 ENDING SUPPORT

The 21Plus Personal Advisor can remain involved with a Nottinghamshire care leaver until:

- the need(s) initially identified by Nottinghamshire Social Care have been met, addressed or resolved
- the young person is disengaging from support or support plan identified;
- the young person is no longer wishing to access the 21Plus Service or retracts their consent for the referral, or agency/organisation to be communicating with Nottinghamshire Social Care on their behalf;
- the young person reaches the age of 25 years old or above

Upon the completion of the support offered by the 21Plus Service, the young person will no longer have a specifically allocated Personal Advisor but remains linked to the 21Plus Service. In these instances, the case will remain inactive until the care leaver makes another request for support or reaches the age of 25 years old.

4.0 KEEPING IN TOUCH

The new duty requires Nottinghamshire Social Care to inform care leavers of the 21Plus Service as they reach the age of 21 years old, and then on an annual basis thereafter. The Personal Advisor within the Leaving Care Team will incorporate details of the 21Plus Service and the local Care Leaver Offer within the last Pathway Plan document prior to the young person reaching the age of 21 years, so that they are fully aware of the service and how to request support (if required).

Attempted contact with the care leaver is required irrespective of whether that young person has previously declined the service offer before. Therefore, Nottinghamshire Social Care will keep appropriate records of contact details for all qualifying care leavers aged 21 – 24 years old and will send communication (either via letter, text, email or social media) to all Nottinghamshire care leavers on a yearly basis as a minimum. This will be in the form of letter communication being attempted the month prior to the care leavers' birthday. This will allow for information to be sent about other universal support that they are able to access prior to their 25th birthday. Where an address is unknown or incorrect for a care leaver, then there will be pro-active attempts to contact care leavers aged 21 – 24 years who are entitled to access the 21Plus Service, so that they are aware of the local Care Leaver Offer and the 21Plus Service and this will be logged on Nottinghamshire's information system.

The 21Plus Service aims to be accessible to care leavers who wish to maintain contact with the Leaving Care Team including their previous Personal Advisor(s) allocated to them. Therefore, we will encourage engagement with our 21Plus care leaver population in a variety of formats and will work with our partner organisations to share information about the 21Plus Service and information of how this service can be accessed.

The method of communication can be agreed upon with the young person in their Pathway Plan before they reach the age of 21 years. However, can be adjusted at their request or in light of the care leaver's specific needs. Communication with qualifying Nottinghamshire care leavers aged 21 – 24 years will be attempted whilst also recognising the duties placed on Nottinghamshire County Council around data protection and data breaches under the GDPR legislation enacted in May 2018.

Nottinghamshire Social Care will collate and share data with the Department for Education (DfE) in relation to the number of care leavers who are qualifying for the new duty within the 21Plus Service and the primary reason for their requested support to Nottinghamshire Social Care.

As part of the local Care Leaver Offer, Nottinghamshire Social Care will collate and share data with the seven local district/borough councils in relation to them receiving Council Tax Exemption. If a care leaver does not wish to be included within this data sharing as they do not wish to receive exemption from Council Tax payments, then they can alert the 21Plus Service and their data will no longer be shared within this agreement.

5.0 21PLUS CARE LEAVERS WHO WERE NOT IN THE CARE OF NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

There will be young people aged 21 – 24 years old who identify as Care Leavers, living in Nottinghamshire but who were not looked after by Nottinghamshire Social Care. The responsible Local Authority where they had *'looked after'* status (and met threshold for entitlement to Leaving Care support) remains the authority responsible for providing a 21Plus Service. However, where possible, Nottinghamshire's 21Plus Service will attempt to re-direct these presenting Care Leavers to their correct responsible authority and will also offer signposting, or limited advice and guidance which may include the identification of any aspects of the Nottinghamshire's Care Leaver Offer, that they may be able to access.

6.0 FORMER UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM SEEKING CHILDREN (UASC)

Former Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) who are identified as qualifying Nottinghamshire care leavers aged 21 – 24 years **will be** able to access the 21Plus service if they have Refugee, Leave to Remain status, or if they are pending a decision by the Home Office in respect of their asylum application.

However, if the former UASC is aged over 21 years with Appeals Rights Exhausted (ARE) status by the Home Office, then they will not be entitled to access the 21Plus Service, under Schedule 3 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act (2002), unless by not providing support, advice and/or guidance, would breach the former UASC's rights under the European Convention on Human Rights. In these cases, if it is unclear whether the former UASC would be eligible for access to the 21Plus Service then consideration of a Human Rights Assessment will be completed. However, if a Human Rights Assessment has already been completed by Nottinghamshire Social Care or another Local Authority within the last 12 months and there has been no significant change of circumstances for the former UASC, then a new Human Rights Assessment may not be required. For further information and guidance on completing a Human Rights Assessment then please refer to the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) Policy and Practice Guidance.