Support for young people leaving the care system

Introduction

When young people have been looked after in the care system, Children’s Services must continue to give them support when they are no longer in care, if they meet certain criteria.

This advice sheet is written for parents/carers or other family members. It explains the duty on Children’s Services to provide support to young people who leave care after the age of 16. If your child has left care before the age of 16, different rules apply.

This advice sheet is quite long because the law in this area is quite complicated so we have divided it into different sections to make it easier for you to read:
- Part 1: Children’s Services duties towards care leavers (page 3)
- Part 2: Some key questions and tips for parents (page 10)
- Part 3: Support for unaccompanied asylum seeking care leavers (page 15)
- Part 4: Where to get further information (page 17)

Since things can seem quite complicated when your local council is involved with your family, you may want to ask a friend or an advocate, to go through this advice sheet with you and explain anything that you don’t understand. If you need more help to understand the information or how it applies to your situation, you can telephone the Family Rights Group Advice Line - contact details are in part 4 of this advice sheet.

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You can find the references for all the legal and practice requirements mentioned in “endnotes” at the end of the advice sheet. For full details of all the documents referred to in the endnotes, see the references section at the end of the advice sheet.

**Note:** “Children’s Social Services” are now known as “Children’s Services”. “Adult Social Services” are now known as “Adult Services”. This is how they are referred to throughout this advice sheet.

Key terms used in this advice sheet include:

‘**Accommodation**’ is when your child is being looked after by Children’s Services with the agreement of the parents or others with parental responsibility. It is sometimes called Section 20 accommodation. For more information about this, see part 2 of FRG advice sheet on Family Support Services [http://www.frg.org.uk/need-help-or-advice/advice-sheets](http://www.frg.org.uk/need-help-or-advice/advice-sheets)

‘**In care**’ means that your child is in care under an interim or full care order or an emergency protection order. For more information see FRG advice sheet on Care (and related) proceedings [http://www.frg.org.uk/need-help-or-advice/advice-sheets](http://www.frg.org.uk/need-help-or-advice/advice-sheets)

‘**Looked after**’ means that your child is in the care system either under a court order (in which case they are ‘in care’) or with your agreement (in which case they are ‘accommodated’). These terms are defined above.

**Parental responsibility** means the legal right to make decisions about how a child is raised and cared for. For more information about parental responsibility, see FRG advice sheet [Parental Responsibility: http://www.frg.org.uk/need-help-or-advice/advice-sheets](http://www.frg.org.uk/need-help-or-advice/advice-sheets)

**Responsible Authority** is a term used in the Children Leaving Care Act. It refers to whichever council last looked after an ‘eligible’ or ‘relevant’ child. These terms are defined on page 4-5.

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PART 1: THE DUTIES ON CHILDREN’S SERVICES TOWARDS CHILDREN WHO LEAVE THE CARE SYSTEM

The basic rule of thumb is that Children’s Services must provide some support to care leavers if they have been looked after in the care system for 13 weeks or more since they were 14 and they are still looked after when they turn 16.

Other children, who are outside this category, do not have a right to support when they leave care except if they are returning home from care to live with their parents (or someone else who has parental responsibility for them) under a care order. In this case, Children Services must provide support to ‘safeguard and promote their welfare’.1

In some other circumstances, children leaving care may get support, depending on their legal status, for example:

- If your child goes to live with a relative and a child arrangements order (used to be called a residence order) or special guardianship order is made by the court, Children’s Services can pay a child arrangements order (residence order) or a special guardianship order allowance to the relative.

- Children’s Services may also provide support in either situation if your child is assessed as being ‘in need’.2

- If your child is under a special guardianship order, and immediately before the order was made they were looked after (in care or accommodated), they can get some support form Children’s Services when they reach 18 – this is discussed further on page 7 below.

For more information see FRG advice sheets Reuniting children in the care system with their families and Support for relatives and friends who are looking after someone else’s child. http://www.frg.org.uk/need-help-or-advice/advice-sheets

How can I find out what support my child will receive when they leave care aged 16 or 17?

Leaving care support is the responsibility of the Children’s Services Department which was looking after the young person when they were in care or accommodation.

For general information about leaving care support, you should ask Children’s Services -

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they are under a duty to have published information/leaflets about the support they provide to care leavers.³

For specific information about the support your child will get, their needs when they leave care will have to be assessed. Children’s Services is under a duty to assess and meet the care and support needs of young people who are assessed as being ‘eligible’, ‘relevant’ children and ‘former relevant’ children particularly in respect of their employment, education and training.⁴ These categories are explained below.

Your child should also receive information directly about leaving care support themselves: Children’s Services must ‘advise, assist and befriend’ every young person they look after with a view to promoting their welfare when they leave the care system.⁵

What support is my child entitled to?

The following categories of young people who are entitled to some kind of leaving care support:

1. Eligible Children:
   
   Your child will be considered an ‘eligible’ child’ if:
   
   - they are aged 16 or 17;
   - they have been looked after by Children’s Services for a period of 13 weeks since they were 14 (this does not have to be continuous). They will still be ‘eligible’ if the period of 13 weeks began after they turned 16; and
   - they are still looked after.⁶

   An eligible child is entitled to:
   
   - continue to receive all the care and support they normally receive until they leave care.
   - have a personal adviser who will give your child advice, support and practical help when they leave care and will also keep their plan for leaving care support under review.⁷

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Have their needs assessed. This will help Children’s Services to plan what support your child will need when they leave care.\(^8\)

**have a pathway plan:** This is a plan which sets out the support Children’s Services will give your child to meet their needs once they leave care. The plan is based on the needs identified in the assessment.\(^9\)

### 2. Relevant Children:

Your child will be considered a ‘relevant’ child if they:\(^10\)

- are aged 16 or 17
- are no longer looked after and
- were previously an ‘eligible child’ (see above definition);

**OR** they \(^11\)

- are aged 16 or 17, and
- are not subject of care order and at the age of 16 they were detained or in hospital and immediately beforehand they had been looked after in the care system

**A relevant child is entitled to:**\(^12\)

- have Children’s Services keep in touch with them;
- have a **personal adviser** who will give your child advice, support and practical help when they leave care and will also keep their plan for leaving care support under review \(^13\)
- have their needs assessed. This will help Children’s Services to plan what support your child will need when they leave care.\(^14\)
- **have a pathway plan:** This sets out the support Children’s Services will give your child to meet their needs once they leave care. The plan is based on the needs identified in the assessment—as above.\(^15\) This plan should take your child’s wishes and feelings into account and should set out details of:
  - suitable **accommodation** that will enable your child to be safe and thrive, and
  - any help they will receive with **education, training or employment.**
3. Former Relevant Child

Your child is in this category if they:\(^6\)

- Are 18 or over
- are under 21 or are still in full time education and
- were previously an eligible or relevant child

**A former relevant child is entitled to:**

- ‘Stay put’ - the law recently changed to give care leavers a potential right to stay put with their former foster carers after they reach 18.

  Children’s Services are now under a legal duty to help a care leaver who has reached 18 to stay with their former foster carers providing:

  - the young person and their carer agree and
  - Children’s Services think this is appropriate.\(^7\)

  This duty also applies where the young person was placed with relatives who have been fostering them as approved foster carers when they were looked after.

  The duty requires Children’s Services to:

  - maintain a former fostering arrangement after the young person reaches 18 if the young person and their foster carer agree that the living arrangement should continue (unless Children’s Services consider it is not consistent with the young persons welfare);
  - monitor the staying put arrangement; and
  - provide advice, assistance and support to the former relevant child and the former foster parent so that the arrangement can continue until the young person is 21 (or sometimes longer).
  - provide financial support to the former foster parent\(^8\)

- have their **pathway plan kept under regular review** taking into account his/her wishes and feelings.\(^9\)

- have Children’s Services keep in touch with them or re-establish contact where it has been lost \(^10\)

- have ongoing support from a **personal adviser**\(^21\)
be provided with **suitable accommodation**. There are particular things which Children’s Services must consider certain factors when deciding if accommodation for your child is suitable

- **Help with the cost of living** near the place where they work or are looking for work or are in education or training

- **Other help** for the young person, including:
  - a contribution to living expenses close to where they work
  - cash if the circumstances are exceptional and this is needed for their well-being
  - enabling them to be in education or training
  - a bursary of £2000 where they are in higher education in accordance with their pathway plan. This is in addition to their duty to provide assistance for education and training.

The category of **former relevant child also includes a young adult who was in care and**

- who is now under 25 and who

- no longer has a pathway plan or personal adviser (because they are 21 or over with programme of education/training finished) AND

- who has told Children’s Services that they want to return to further education or training.

A young person in this category is entitled to:

- **have a personal adviser**

- **have his/her needs assessed** to decide what support is needed

- **have a pathway plan** setting out the support they will get to help them with living and college expenses and also the higher education bursary they will receive.

4. **Other young people who qualify for leaving care advice and assistance:**

Your child is in this category if they

- are 16 or over but under 21 (or under 25 if they are still in education or training) and

- were looked after by Children’s Services at any time after reaching 16 and
☐ are not an eligible, relevant of former relevant child (see above for who is in these categories) or privately fostered or under a special guardianship order. 29
OR they
☐ are 16 or over but under 21 and
☐ are under a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or were when they turned 18 and
☐ were looked after in the care system as a child immediately before the SGO was made

If your child is in this category:
- they will be entitled to ‘advice and assistance’ form Children’s Services, which may, be in cash; 30
- Children’s Services may also give them help with living expenses near where they work or are in education or training; if they are in higher education, they may also help them with securing vacation accommodation. 31

What happens when my child’s needs are assessed?

When your child’s need for help after they leave care is assessed, the social worker will look at: 32
☐ their health needs,
☐ any need/wish they have to continue with education/training, and
☐ their support needs, including continuing their need for care, accommodation, help to maintain family relationships and help with managing their finances.

The assessment should always take into account your child’s views as well as those of their parents or any other person who has parental responsibility for them. The assessment must be completed within 3 months of them becoming an eligible or relevant child – i.e. on reaching the age of 16 and meeting the ‘time looked after criteria’ of 13 weeks since the age of 14.
Children’s Services must draw up a statement saying how and when the assessment is to be carried out, and who is responsible for it. A copy of this statement should be provided to the young person.

**What is a pathway plan?**

A pathway plan sets out the support that will be provided to your child when they leave care. It should be informed by an assessment of their needs and will include things like:

- support with education/training,
- suitable accommodation,
- help to find and job and
- help to manage their money.

The pathway plan “ought to set out operational objectives with sufficient detail – including detail of the ‘how, who, what and when’ - to enable the plan to be used as a means of checking whether or not those objectives are being met”.

The plan must give details of who will be responsible for providing your child with each kind of support and who will provide them with personal support and how frequently this will happen.

Children’s Services should listen to your child’s wishes when devising this plan. The plan must be recorded in writing, and your child should be given a copy in a format that is understandable to them. Their personal adviser should not be involved in drawing up the pathway plan.

The plan should be reviewed at least every six months and the results of this review should be recorded in writing.

**What does a personal adviser do?**

They have a number of functions including:

- being responsible for co-ordinating the advice and support given to the young person; and
- having regular contact with the young person and keeping records of this.
PART 2: KEY QUESTIONS AND TIPS FOR PARENTS

What happens if a young person returns home before the age of 16?

The support they get will depend on who they are going to live with and the legal status they have when they return home:

- If there is no care order and they are returning to live with their parents or someone else with parental responsibility for them from care, they will stop being a looked after child but Children’s Services should still provide support if it is necessary to make sure the child is safe and well cared for. If they remain there for more than 6 months continuously, they will not be entitled to leaving care support under the Leaving Care Act, unless the ‘return home’ arrangements later break down, in which case they will be treated as a relevant child and get support accordingly.

- If they remain looked after by Children’s Services (in accommodation or care) and they are going to live with a relative or friend, that person must be approved as a foster carer for them and Children’s Services must support them. If they remain looked after until they are 16, they will also be entitled to leaving care support as an eligible/relevant child set out on page 4-7 above.

- If the child goes to live with a relative or friend, and is no longer looked after, for example because they are under residence or special guardianship order, then Children’s Services may provide support.

- If they were looked after immediately before the special guardianship order was made, they can get some support from Children’s Services when they reach 18 – see page 7 above.

- A parent or carer can claim or re-claim child benefit for a child under 16 who comes to live with them, even if the care order is still in place. Other benefits such as child tax credit and housing benefit might also be payable. See FRG advice What happens to your benefits when your child goes into care or lives with someone else?  http://www.frg.org.uk/need-help-or-advice/advice-sheets
What happens if a young person returns home from care after the age of 16?

If a young person who qualifies as a ‘relevant child’ returns to live with a parent or someone with parental responsibility for a period longer than six months, they stop being classed as a ‘relevant’ child and therefore will not get leaving care support when they reach 18.40

What benefits can young people when they are looked after and when they leave care?

Children’s Services Departments in England and Wales are responsible for financially supporting young people who are:

- eligible children,
- relevant children41

Therefore, these young people cannot normally claim income support, housing benefit, or the income-related versions of JSA (jobseekers allowance) and ESA (employment and support allowance).

However, there are exceptions to this rule:

- the young person can still claim other benefits such as carer’s allowance; DLA (disability living allowance) or it’s replacement, PIP (personal independence payment) Young people who have a child living with them can still claim income support when aged 16/17. This applies whether the young person is in education or not, and irrespective of whether they are with foster carers, living with family or anywhere else they can also claim child benefit and child tax credit for the child who is living with them and they may be entitled to the £500 Maternity Grant. It is not relevant to any of the above claims as to whether their child is looked-after as well or not, so long as the child is with the parent;
- Young people who are unfit for work (on a temporary or permanent basis) can claim ESA from age 16, even if still in education (but if in education, they need to also be claiming DLA or PIP as well);
- Housing benefit is not payable though, even if income support or ESA is paid, until the young person reaches 18. At that stage, a young person who is ‘staying put’ with former foster carers will usually be expected by Children’s Services for financial support to continue

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Services to make a housing benefit claim, based on the ‘rent’ they are being charged and the income, from benefits or wages, that they receive;

- **Bursary for students who are looked after:** Young people aged 16/17 (in school Year 12 or above) who are looked-after and who are still in non-advanced education (A levels or below) can claim the ‘16-19 Bursary’ that replaced the Education Maintenance Allowance. The same applies to 18-19 year old care-leavers. The bursary is £1200 per year and can be claimed via the college or school or see [www.gov.uk/1619-bursary-fund/overview](http://www.gov.uk/1619-bursary-fund/overview) for more information. There is a separate scheme in place for Scotland, Wales and N.Ireland.

- Once the young person reaches 18, they have the same access to the benefit system as any other 18 year old, wherever they are living. This includes the right to claim jobseekers allowance if unemployed or income support if in non-advanced education and ‘estranged’ from parents. Young people who are staying-put and are still in non-advanced education often use this route to claim income support.

- Income support, JSA, ESA, child tax credit and housing benefit are all being replaced, between 2015 and 2018, by a new benefit called **universal credit**. This benefit is designed to meet the same needs as the benefit it replaces but it will be a single claim (to the DWP) for one single monthly payment to cover rent, living expenses, and support for children (if any). The biggest advantage of universal credit is that it will continue to be paid as someone moves into work so they won’t have to stop and start various other benefits when that happens – the credit will be adjusted each month based on what the young person earns in the previous month.

  Note: If the young person is an asylum-seeker, or is from an EEA country, or is subject to any form of immigration control or restriction, they should get advice about their benefit entitlement before making any claims.

**Which Children’s Services Department should provide leaving care support?**

The Children’s Services Department which was looking after the child should continue to give financial support to the young people who fall into the categories set
out in the section ‘What support is my child entitled to’ above at page 4, even if they are then living in the area of another Children’s Services department.

**Note:**

- **If the 16/17 year old returns to live with their family**, Children’s Services remains financially responsible for them for 6 months or until they reach 18, whichever comes first.
- **If a relevant child moves to another Children’s Services area and needs help**, the second authority should provide short-term assistance under s.17 of Children Act 1989.
- **A young person who is not looked-after but is being financially supported under Section 17 CA 1989**, can access benefits in the same way as any other 16/17 year old.
  - They may also be entitled to income support if they are in education and ‘estranged’ from parents and living away from them.
  - Alternatively, if they’ve left education, they may be due Jobseekers allowance if they have recently left that education or they would otherwise be in severe hardship, but the Section 17 money may be seen as providing enough support. Normally however, Section 17 money does not count as income when benefits are calculated.

**Can the young person complain if they are not getting the right leaving care support and who will help them with this?**

Yes. Children’s Services must have a procedure for dealing with complaints about leaving care services as well as services provided when they are looked after. They should also provide young people with an advocate to help them with this, and give them full information about their rights in relation to making a complaint.

**As a parent, how can I help my child get the leaving care support they need to meet their needs?**

- Children’s Services must ask you (the parent) for your views at or before every review of your child whilst they are looked after. This would be a good time for you to say what you think about the kind of support your child might benefit from when they leave care.
• Ask for a copy of the Children’s Services’ written information about leaving care services
• Point out that they should be providing your child with a personal adviser, assess their care leaving needs and prepare a pathway plan for them no later than 3 months after they turn 16.
• If you disagree with the support your child is being offered in the pathway plan or you feel that your views were not been properly considered during the assessment process (see page 7 above), ask for details of the complaints procedure, which Children’s Services must have by law.
PART 3: LEAVING CARE SUPPORT FOR UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM SEEKING CHILDREN/YOUNG PEOPLE

What support can unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children get?

- An unaccompanied asylum seeking young person who is an eligible or relevant child (i.e. under 18) is entitled to the same support as any other eligible or relevant child.
- An unaccompanied asylum seeker who is 18 or over may qualify for support if they meet the normal criteria for being a former relevant child or person qualifying for advice and assistance; BUT there are some extra restrictions in asylum and immigration legislation which may prevent them from receiving that support. For example:
  
i) If an unaccompanied asylum seeking young person meets the criteria for a ‘former relevant child’ (see page 5 above) AND at the time of their 18th birthday, they have been granted refugee status, or humanitarian protection or discretionary leave to remain in the UK beyond their 18th birthday, then they will be entitled to all the services available to a ‘former relevant child’ as set out above. BUT
  
ii) If an unaccompanied asylum seeking young person meets the criteria for a ‘former relevant child’ (see page 5 above) BUT at the time of their 18th birthday, their asylum claim has not been decided or it has been refused their immigration status will be taken into account by Children’s Services when they consider what support to provide under the Leaving Care Act.

Note: If their asylum claim/appeal has not been decided:

- They are eligible for the full range of support available to a ‘former relevant child’ (as set out on page 6 above) whilst their claim is being decided; and
- They may also be entitled to asylum support (accommodation and subsistence) from the UK Border Agency. Any leaving care payments made by Children’s Services will be taken into account by the UKBA when calculating their asylum support.

Once the young person’s asylum claim and any appeal rights are finally decided (after they reach 18), whether or not they continue to get leaving care...
support will depend upon whether they are granted leave to remain in the UK, and if not, how they made their original claim for asylum. If they made their claim:

- ‘at port of entry to the UK’, they will be entitled to continuing leaving care support unless/until they fail to comply with any removal directions; but if it was made
- ‘in-country’ (eg: at an asylum screening unit), they will be unlawfully in the UK as soon as their asylum claim is finally decided. This will stop them from being entitled to any leaving care support unless this is necessary to avoid a breach of their human rights.\(^{46}\)

If the young person was refused asylum before their 18\(^{th}\) birthday and/or any grant of discretionary leave ended before their 18\(^{th}\) birthday, then unless they have applied for an extension of leave to remain in the UK or they have a fresh asylum claim pending, they are likely to be denied leaving care support once they turn 18 (because they are no longer an asylum seeker hence are now unlawfully in the UK). However

- Some services, such as having a personal advisor, and reviewing pathway plans, should still be available as these are not strictly ‘support and assistance’.\(^{47}\)
- If the young person has no other accommodation, Children Services may provide them with accommodation but only if this is necessary to avoid a breach of their human rights. However they should take legal advice from an immigration specialist before they ask for this help because Children’s Services have to tell the UKBA if anyone who is a ‘Schedule 3 asylum seeker’ asks them for help.\(^{48}\) This means that if they ask Children’s Services for help, Children Services may pass that information to the UKBA, who may then take steps to remove them from the UK.

Note: The young person will be a schedule 3 asylum seeker if

- i) they are an asylum seeker whose claim has been refused AND
- (i) they have failed to co-operate with removal directions; OR
- (ii) they are unlawfully in the UK (this will apply where their original asylum claim was made in the UK, rather than at a Port of Entry).

\textbf{If the young person is a former relevant child who has been refused support because of their immigration status they should seek further advice from the Refugee Council Children’s Panel or from a solicitor or FRG advice service.}
PART 4: WHERE TO GET FURTHER INFORMATION

1. Parents and young people can get further independent advice about leaving care support from:

**Civil Legal Advice (CLA):** This is a free and confidential advice service run on behalf of the government. It provides information and legal advice directly to the public on common legal issues; helps people work out if they are eligible for free legal advice from a solicitor; and helps them find a solicitor if so.  
Website: [https://www.gov.uk/civil-legal-advice](https://www.gov.uk/civil-legal-advice)  
Telephone: 0845 345 4345 or text ‘legalaid’ and your name to 80010 to get a call back

**Coram Children’s Legal Centre** provides free independent legal advice to children, parents, carers and professionals. Their Child Law Advice Line provides free legal advice and information covering all aspects of law and policy affecting children. An advisor can be contacted on 0808 802 0008. The advice line is open from 8.00am to 8.00pm Monday to Friday.

**Family Rights Group:** is an organisation which provides free telephone and email advice to family members who are involved with Children's Services about the care and protection of their children.

- Contact FRG’s advice line for further advice, on 0808 801 0366. It is open Monday-Friday 9.30am-3.00pm. You can also email to advice@frg.org.uk.
- You can also visit [http://www.frg.org.uk/need-help-or-advice/advice-sheets](http://www.frg.org.uk/need-help-or-advice/advice-sheets), where you can download other relevant advice sheets.
- There are parent and family and friends carers discussion boards at: [http://www.frg.org.uk/discussion-board-for-homepage](http://www.frg.org.uk/discussion-board-for-homepage).
- Family Rights group can also put you in touch with a Family Group Conference Service. Email office@frg.org.uk.

**Solicitor:**
To find a solicitor who specialises in children law and/or immigration law: you can contact:

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1. Solicitors Regulation Authority, Ipsley Court, Redditch, Worcestershire B98 0TD
   Telephone: 0870 606 2555  http://www.sra.org.uk/consumers/find-use-instruct-solicitor.page;

2. The Law Society of England and Wales, 113 Chancery Lane, London WC2A 1PL
   Tel: 020 7242 1222  Minicom: 0870 600 1560  Fax: 020 7831 0344
   E-mail: info.services@lawsociety.org.uk  www.lawsociety.org.uk
   You can search their website for details of local solicitors who are members of the Children Panel:
   http://www.lawsociety.org.uk/choosingandusing/findasolicitor.law

3. Civil Legal Advice (CLA) See details above.

4. Citizens Advice may be able to recommend a local solicitor specialising in child care law. Citizens Advice is an independent organisation providing free, confidential and impartial advice on all subjects to anyone. The address and telephone number of your local CAB can be found in the telephone directory. There is also advice on line on their website.
   Website www.citizensadvice.org.uk
   Advice on line Website www.adviceguide.org.uk

2. Unaccompanied asylum seeking care leavers can get further advice from:

Refugee Council Unaccompanied Children’s Panel
240-250 Ferndale Road
Brixton
London SW9 8BB
Advice line: 0207 346 1134
Open Mondays to Fridays: 9.30am – 5.30pm
Refugee Council online www.refugeecouncil.org.uk
### References

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Last updated 15th December 2014

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1. Reg 20 CPPCRR
2. S.17 CA
3. Sch 2 para 1 (2) CA
4. Sched 2 para 19B CA
5. Sched 2 para 19A CA
6. Sched 2 para 19B CA; R(Berhe) v London Borough of Hillingdon (2003) EWHC 2075 (Admin
7. Reg 44 CPPCRR: and sch 2 para 19C CA
8. Reg 42 CPPCRR: and sch 2 para 19B CA
9. Reg 43 CPPCRR; and sch 2 para 19B CA
10. s23A (2)CA
11. Reg 3 (2) CL(E)R
12. s.23B CA
13. Sch 2 para19C CA
14. Reg 42 CPPCRR
15. Reg 43 CPPCRR
16. s23C CA
17. s 23CZA CA
18. s 23CZA(4) CA
19. s23C(3) (b)CA & Reg 4(1)(A) CLER

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