

Wiltshire Council

Full Council

16 October 2018

Subject: Care Leavers Council Tax Exemption

Cabinet member: Councillor Laura Mayes – Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Skills.

Key Decision: Yes

Executive Summary

Following the implementation of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 our duties and responsibilities to care leavers have been extended. Included in the Act is a requirement to publish a Local Offer for care leavers, providing information about services which the local authority offers that may assist care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living.

Following broad consultation and analysis of local need a draft Local Offer has been prepared, it is our intention to publish this ahead of National Care Leaver Week starting 24 October 2018.

Our Local Offer has been scrutinised by Corporate Parenting Panel, a Rapid Scrutiny working group and Children's Select Committee. The core elements included in the Offer have been endorsed.

Proposals

Wiltshire Council Care Leavers are exempted from Council Tax to include care leavers whom live within and outside the Wiltshire Council boundary, as set out in appendix B.

Reasons for Proposals

This proposal will assist care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living and thus support us in delivering our statutory duties.

Terence Herbert

Corporate Director for Children, Education and Communities

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Key Decision: Key

Purpose of Report

1. To seek the endorsement from Cabinet for our proposal to exempt Wiltshire Care Leavers from Council Tax.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

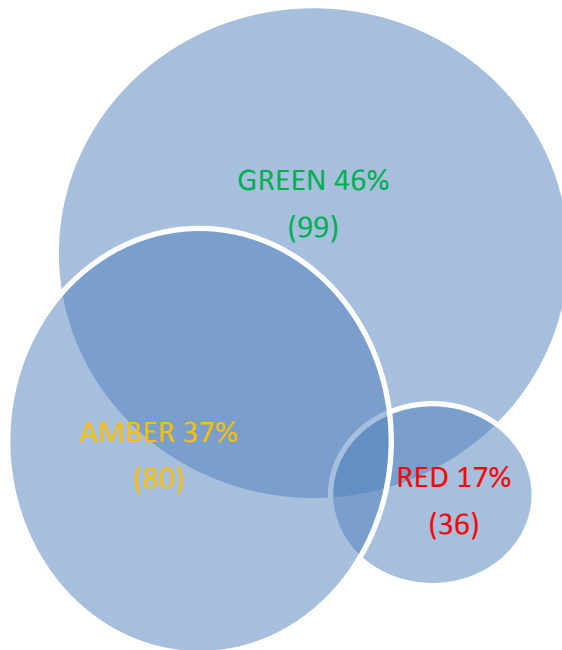
2. One of the key priorities in the Council Business Plan is protecting those who are most vulnerable. We want to build communities that enable all residents to have a good start in life, enjoying healthy and fulfilling lives and we are committed to provide people with the opportunities and skills through investment. Where care is needed, health and social care will be delivered seamlessly to the highest standards. Improving outcomes for our Care Leavers is one of the goals and thus a priority group.

Background

3. Following the implementation of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 our duties and responsibilities to care leavers have been extended. Included in the Act is a requirement to publish a Local Offer for care leavers, providing information about services which the local authority offers that may assist care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living. This includes services relating to health and well-being; relationships; education and training; employment; accommodation; participation in society.

Main Considerations for the Council

4. Currently in Wiltshire there are 215 care leavers; the majority of these (165) are aged between 19 and 21 years.
5. We undertake a regular screen of our care leaver population. The screen has been developed by Barnardos to support service development and it provides a RAG rating across domains including accommodation, mental health, education, employment and social inclusion. Findings from the last screen are summarised below:



Young people can move through each section / colour depending on their level of stability. Significant events have an impact on this, depending on the outcome for the young person. Crisis events tend to see them move into red, their ability to cope with crisis and significant events affects their stability. This impacts on a worker's priorities.

6. Green / stable cases have a strong correlation with a long term stable placement through their care career or towards the end. These young people enjoyed good attachments and relationships with carers, they are particularly well engaged in education or training. Common features include:
 - integrated family life in an excellent foster placement
 - doing very well in GCSEs or at collage
 - continues to make excellent progress and is working at or above expected progress
 - SATS better than expected
 - higher education an ambition
 - employed
 - has her own tenancy
 - described as gifted and talented

7. Amber cases have likely experienced several temporary placements, are less likely be in education or employment, are more difficult to engage and more likely to have mental health issues. Emotional and behavioural development is of concern. Common features include:
 - history of self-harm
 - exclusions
 - NEET
 - SEND
 - hasn't received any formal education (UASC – unaccompanied asylum-seeking children)
 - disengaged

8. Red cases have a strong correlation with those who have had several placements in different areas, including out of county placements, complex mental health needs, NEET, traumatic childhoods and journey through care. Common features include;
 - history of domestic abuse, affecting self esteem
 - inability to form attachments and have meaningful relationships

- at risk of CSE
 - sexualised behaviour
 - delayed development
 - homeless
 - suicidal tendencies and self-harm and ongoing emotional concerns
9. The local screen reinforces what the national data tells us regarding the vulnerability of care leavers.
 10. The lasting impact of the events and circumstances that led to a child being taken into care; the high incidence of Special Educational Needs (SEN) among care leavers (around 60% of children in care for 12 months have SEN, compared to 15% of children in the general population) and emotional health problems (around half of children in care have a Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) score that is borderline or cause for concern); the impact of placement moves while in care (including the resultant change in school that often occurs) – all contribute to low attainment, with only 14% of children in care nationally achieving 5 good GCSEs.
 11. Leaving school with few qualifications adversely affects care leavers' progress into higher education, apprenticeships and skilled jobs. Consequently, 39% of care leavers nationally are not in education, employment or training. Some these care leavers may have to rely wholly upon universal support and depending on the type of accommodation they occupy; universal credit may meet some of their living costs and some of their housing costs but it does not provide any support in respect of council tax.
 12. Research undertaken at national level consistently demonstrates that in the longer-term, outcomes for care leavers remain poor. 49% of men under 21 who have come into contact with the criminal justice system have been in care, whilst 25% of people experiencing homelessness have also spent time in care (NAO 2015).
 13. Within the Care Leaver Offer we are building a range of additional supports which continue to build upon the positive work we are doing to enable our care leavers to succeed. We have embedded into our work the principle of 'care-proofing' our policies and practices where corporate parents recognise the vulnerability of care leavers as young adults and therefore prioritise and reference them as a protected or vulnerable group. This approach has been effective; it has enabled us for example to recognise the vulnerability of care leavers explicitly within the Council Business Plan.
 14. As well as the historic factors that they have experienced care leavers also face the added challenge of having to cope with the demands of living on their own at a young age, having to manage finances, maintain a house/flat and manage to live independently without the support from families that most of us take for granted. That is why it is incumbent upon the Council as the corporate parent to do as much as it can to give care leavers the support and opportunities to succeed.

15. The Communities and Local Government Select Committee, which has conducted an inquiry into homelessness, has called upon government to consider reviewing the transition to independence for care leavers, after hearing evidence that around 24 per cent of homeless people have been in care. It has stressed the additional challenges which care leavers face in achieving financial independence. Expecting care leavers to be responsible for council tax as soon as they leave care undoubtedly adds additional pressure during what is a particularly vulnerable period for them.
16. 77 Local authorities across the country already exempt care leavers from council tax. In doing so many have cited the particular vulnerability of care leavers and emphasised that this is one area in which the council can take positive local action to support 'their children and young people'. The proposed policy is attached at appendix B. We estimate that to implement this change in Wiltshire will cost the Council and major precepting authorities approximately £60,000 annually.
17. As corporate parents by exempting care leavers from council tax we would demonstrate to them that we understand the lasting impact of the early trauma they have suffered. We will also be providing a strong and clear message that as the corporate parent will prioritise the needs of this group and commit to supporting them into adulthood.

Safeguarding Implications

18. Safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults is core business for the service and thus Personal Advisers working care leavers are experienced and skilled at dealing with safeguarding issues. This specific proposal does not have any safeguarding implications rather would have a positive impact on life chances and outcomes for care leavers.

Public Health Implications

19. The proposal is for a specific group of young people and will not have any impact on the general public's health and wellbeing. The overall implications of the proposals will have a positive public health impacts which may include, but are not restricted to, direct health implications, sustainability, maintaining a healthy and resilient environment, economic impacts, reducing or widening inequalities and the wider determinants of health.

Corporate Procurement Implications

20. There are no procurement implications.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

21. This proposal will impact positively on care leavers as the removal of this payment will improve their ability to manage their finances and thus reduce barriers that exist. Care leavers with protected characteristics will

be entitled to this exemption alongside all other care leavers. Care leavers should be prioritised and referenced as a protected or vulnerable group.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

22. There are no environmental and climate change considerations because of this proposal because energy consumption and carbon emissions will not change. Furthermore, there are no risks associated with environmental management/impact or climate change issues that require consideration.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

23. The risks associated of not approving this proposal are linked to the Council's reputation noting that over half of all Local Authorities already offer this exemption. Furthermore, it could impact negatively on the next Ofsted inspection outcome and there are risks associated with individual care leavers' financial stability.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

24. There are no risks associated with taking this action.

Financial Implications

25. The total cost of the scheme is estimated at £60,000 which will largely be shared by the Council, Wiltshire Police and Wiltshire and Dorset Fire and Rescue Authority. The Council's share of the cost will be absorbed within the Collection Fund.
26. The two major precepting authorities have been consulted and their views will be reported at the meeting.

Legal Implications

27. Following the implementation of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 our duties and responsibilities to care leavers have been extended. Included in the Act is a requirement to publish a Local Offer for care leavers, providing information about services which the local authority offers that may assist care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living. This proposal assists us in delivering our statutory responsibilities and is a decision that can be made by the Council to enhance our offer to care leavers.

Options Considered

28. There are 2 options:
1. Continue to charge care leavers Council Tax
 2. Amend policy and give care leavers Council Tax Exemption.

Conclusions

29. The conclusions reached having taken all the above into account is that option 2 is endorsed given the financial implications are limited yet the social value is significant and assists us in delivering our statutory responsibilities.

Proposals

30. Wiltshire Council Care Leavers are exempted from Council Tax to include care leavers whom live within and outside the Wiltshire Council boundary, as set out in appendix B.

Reasons for Proposals

31. This proposal will assist care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living and thus support us in delivering our statutory duties.

Terence Herbert

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Date of report: 14.9.18

Appendices

Children's Select Committee Report
Proposed Council Tax Exemption Scheme for Care Leavers
Minute from Cabinet decision on 9th October 2018 – To follow