



North Devon Council

Report Date: 2nd October 2023

Topic: Supporting Care Leavers

Report by: Sarah Higgins, Head of Customer Focus

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Government made recommendations in its care leavers strategy “Keep on Caring” that local authorities should consider exempting carer leavers from Council Tax, using their existing discretionary powers under Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended).
- 1.2 As a result, many Councils have introduced a council tax discount for care leavers.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. Care Leavers, up to their 25th birthday, will receive a Council Tax discount of up to 100% from 1st October 2023.
- 2.2. North Devon Council to fund the scheme for the period October 2023 – March 2024.
- 2.3. Members agree we amend the Exceptional Hardship policy, which is part of our overall Council Tax Reduction Scheme, which will enable the costs to be absorbed by the overall Collection Fund from April 2024.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Care leavers are considered a particularly vulnerable group for Council Tax debt. Moving to independent accommodation and managing their finances for the first time is challenging, as care leavers do so without the family support and the wider network that most young people can rely on, and indeed take for granted.
- 3.2 This scheme will ensure no care leaver will fall into council tax debt during the transition years from leaving Local Authority care into adulthood.

4. REPORT

- 4.1. Corporate parenting principles for looked after children and care leavers stress the importance of joint working in supporting care leavers. At the Devon Strategic Corporate Parenting Board, work is underway to look at an enhanced approach to corporate parenting. This includes improving access for those in the care system to work experience and employment and, for when they leave care, to housing. The Council has a statutory duty to co-operate with the County Council in making arrangements for improving the wellbeing of children in Devon.

- 4.2. Devon billing authorities (district councils) have been working with Devon County Council (DCC) to agree a Council Tax discount scheme to be effective from 1 October 2023 for all care leavers up to their 25th birthday.
- 4.3. Whilst district councils are implementing the scheme in slightly different ways, the result for care leavers will be the same.
- 4.4. To allow the necessary changes to local policies to be made, and not to delay support for care leavers, districts have agreed in principle to fund the scheme for the 6 month period October 2023 – March 2024 subject to Committee agreement.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. For the six months from October 23 – March 24 the anticipated costs, based on up to date data from DCC, will be no more than £6,500.
- 5.2. From April 2024 the cost of the scheme will be absorbed by the overall collection fund via an amendment to our Exceptional Hardship Fund policy.

6. EQUALITIES ASSESSMENT

Looked after children and care leavers are some of the most vulnerable residents in our society and can experience some of the worst outcomes as children and moving into adulthood. They are not one of the protected groups outlined in the Equality Act 2010.

A full Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed.

Care leavers with protected characteristics will be entitled to this discount alongside all other care leavers.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

- 7.1. No environmental assessment required

8. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 8.1. What impact, positive or negative, does the subject of this report have on

- 8.1.1. Improving customer focus – This scheme will ensure we are supporting some of our most vulnerable young adults.

9. CONSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

- 9.1. Part 3 Annexe 1 paragraph 1:
- 9.2. Delegated power



10. STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

This report contains no confidential information or exempt information under the provisions of Schedule 12A of 1972 Act.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background paper was used in the preparation of this report:

Keep on Caring: Supporting young people from care to independence

(The background papers are available for inspection and kept by the author of the report).

12. STATEMENT OF INTERNAL ADVICE

The author (below) confirms that advice has been taken from all appropriate Councillors and Officers: Sarah Higgins, Head of Customer Focus October 2023