

	<p><b>Full Council</b> <b>31 July 2018</b></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Title</b></p>	<p><b>Council Tax Reduction for Care Leavers</b></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Report of</b></p>	<p>The Leader of the Council</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Wards</b></p>	<p>All</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Status</b></p>	<p>Public</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Urgent</b></p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Key</b></p>	<p>No</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Enclosures</b></p>	<p>Appendix A – Care Leaver Council Tax Reduction Policy Appendix B – Care Leaver Council Tax Reduction Policy Consultation results</p>
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<p><b>Summary</b></p>
<p>This paper provides information on the proposed Care Leaver Council Tax Reduction Policy and responses from consultation. It seeks approval from Full Council on the implementation of the Policy.</p>
<p><b>Recommendations</b></p>
<p>The report recommends that the Council:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Note the consultation results in Appendix B pertaining to a policy for offering council tax relief to care leavers based on guaranteed relief for their first two years of independent living or until their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday, whichever is first.</li> <li>2. Ratify the endorsement from Policy and Resources Committee of the Care Leaver Council Tax Reduction Policy attached in Appendix A, to be implemented and</li> </ol>

backdated to 1 April 2018.

## **1. WHY THIS REPORT IS NEEDED**

### **1.1 Executive Summary**

1.1.1 The Children's Services Improvement Action Plan recognises the need to improve outcomes for care leavers, and in particular to ensure that they have access to appropriate discretionary funds and reliefs, improve outcomes and ensure they are adequately prepared for independent living.

1.1.2 Following Policy and Resources Committee on 11 June 2018, changes to the proposed Policy were endorsed by the Committee with the amended Policy to be sent to Full Council for ratification.

### **1.2 Council Tax Relief for Care Leavers**

1.2.1 The Children's Services Improvement Action Plan recognises the need to improve outcomes for care leavers, and in particular to ensure that they have access to appropriate discretionary funds and reliefs, improve outcomes and ensure they are adequately prepared for independent living.

1.2.2 A briefing paper on council tax reduction for Barnet care leavers was finalised and presented to Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel on 3 February 2018.

1.2.3 The proposal was approved at Policy & Resources Committee on 13 February 2018 to authorise the Deputy Chief Executive to consult on a policy for offering council tax relief to care leavers based on guaranteed relief for their first two years of independent living or up to age 25, and a presumption in favour of granting relief should it be required after that up to age 25; and instruct the Deputy Chief Executive to bring the policy to a future meeting of the committee for approval.

1.2.4 The Consultation ran from 21st March to 20th May 2018 and received:

- 15 online survey responses from care leavers
- 4 facilitated discussion responses from care leavers
- 4 survey responses from other Barnet residents

1.2.5 The total number of care leavers that responded (n=19) equates to 8% of the total number of 18-25-year-old care leavers as at March 2018.

1.2.6 The majority of respondents strongly agree or agree with each element of the proposed policy. The recommendation is therefore to implement the Care Leaver Council Tax Reduction scheme, backdated to 1 April 2018.

1.2.7 A full breakdown of the consultation results can be found in Appendix B.

1.2.8 Following the consultation, the proposed Policy was extended on the basis of feedback received, to provide a 'pause period' within the two-year guaranteed relief period, whilst a care leaver is a full-time student. This ensures that care leavers can undertake Education opportunities and still benefit from the scheme once their studies have been completed.

1.2.9 The Policy can be found at Appendix A.

## **2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1.1 The Government Strategy *Keep on Caring – supporting young people from care to independence* (July 2016) confirms that the corporate parenting should apply in relation to provision of all the services that the local authority provides, not just the Children's Services department. The strategy recommends that local authorities consider discounts and exemptions from council tax for care leavers as a way of providing financial support and assisting them with establishing stability in their home lives.

2.1.2 Many care leavers are already granted relief from Council Tax in accordance with the existing discretionary council tax relief policy. However, there is no specific policy for Barnet care leavers.

2.1.3 It is proposed that equivalent financial assistance should also be available to Barnet care leavers living outside Barnet.

2.1.4 The policy will apply to Barnet care leavers only, however care leavers from other boroughs living within Barnet can apply for relief under the Council's existing discretionary council tax relief policy. Care leavers from other local authorities whom are resident in Barnet, should contact their responsible local authority in the first instance to enquire about council tax assistance. Should further financial support be required, all non-Barnet care leavers are able to apply for discretionary relief under the general provisions of Section 13A.

2.1.5 In addition to the proposed policy, the Council has duties to care leavers and this includes the power to provide financial assistance if they are struggling to meet housing or other costs.

2.1.6 The transition to independent living can be a particularly challenging time for care leavers. As the corporate parent, the council must support this transition as fully as possible.

2.1.7 Recommendation 19 within Barnet's Single Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board report, (Ofsted, 7 July 2017) outlines that the Council should '*ensure care leavers have tools, such as money management, to cope with life's challenges...*'.

2.1.8 Implementing the Council Tax Reduction Policy will provide care leavers with a period to adjust to independent living – a minimum of two years or up until their 25th birthday (whichever is first). During this time, care leavers will be

able to receive appropriate support and guidance pertaining to financial matters, thus increasing their chance of success in adulthood and resilience to cope with life's challenges.

### **3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED**

- 3.1 The council could choose not to create a policy, but this is not in accordance with best practice on the Council's corporate parenting duties for care leavers.
- 3.2 A blanket exemption until age 25 for all care leavers was considered. However, one of the council's key aims is to support care leavers to a position where they can live successful independent lives. A blanket exemption runs the risk that insufficient attention is paid to supporting care leavers to develop independent financial management and budgeting skills.

### **4. POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION**

- 4.1 The Revenues and Benefits and Onwards and Upwards Team Manager will implement the Policy as included in Appendix A.

### **5. IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION**

#### **5.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance**

- 5.1.1 Improving services to children and young people has the highest priority within the Council following last year's Ofsted judgement that services were inadequate.
- 5.1.2 The implementation of a Care Leaver Council Tax Policy is a key mechanism through which Barnet Council and its partners will deliver the Family Friendly Barnet vision to be the most family friendly borough in London by 2020.
- 5.1.3 This supports the following Council's corporate priorities as expressed through the Corporate Plan for 2015-20 which sets out the vision and strategy for the next five years based on the core principles of fairness, responsibility and opportunity, to make sure Barnet is a place;
  - Of opportunity, where people can further their quality of life
  - Where people are helped to help themselves, recognising that prevention is better than cure

#### **5.2 Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)**

- 5.2.1 Council tax discounts are administered under section 13A(1)(c), which means they are discretionary local reliefs which must be paid fully by the local authority. As such a transfer will be made from the general fund to the collection fund at the end of each financial year to reflect the loss in Council Tax due to the actual awards made in relation to the discount. This will ensure preceptors are not any worse off because of the Council's decision to

operate a discretionary local policy.

5.2.2 The additional financial impact of the policy is estimated to be negligible, as many care leavers were already eligible for support under the existing discretionary scheme.

5.2.3 Financial assistance to Barnet Care Leavers living outside the borough will be met within the Family Services budget. The relatively low number of care leavers in this position again means that costs are expected to be extremely low (below £10k) relative to the scale of other service costs.

### **5.3 Social Value**

5.3.1 Supporting care leavers to achieve successful independent lives provides significant value to the individuals, wider society and the public purse.

### **5.4 Legal and Constitutional References**

5.4.1 There are a number of pieces of legislation and statutory guidance that set out the role of the local authority in respect of cared for children and care leavers. This includes duties under the Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 contains new duties in relation to care leavers, which if brought into force, will extend some duties to 25 years.

5.4.2 Under Section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 the Council has the power to reduce (or further reduce) liability for council tax for a chargeable dwelling for a specified period of time in any case as the local authority for the area in which the dwelling is situated thinks fit. Subsection (6) confirms that such reduction includes the power to reduce the liability to nil. Subsection (7) confirms that the power may be exercised in relation to a particular case or by determining a class of cases.

5.4.3 As a Council tax reduction scheme this matter falls within those matters reserved for a full Council decision.

### **5.5 Risk Management**

5.5.1 No risks have been identified from the consultation responses and recommendation to implement this policy.

### **5.6 Equalities and Diversity**

5.6.1 Care leavers are disproportionately likely to be male and from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. As a group, the significant challenges they face can typically be much greater than those in the general population, and therefore support to care leavers in general contributes towards the council's Public-Sector Equality Duty.

### **5.7 Corporate Parenting**

- 5.7.1 In July 2016, the Government published their Care Leavers' strategy Keep on Caring which outlined that the "... [the government] will introduce a set of corporate parenting principles that will require all departments within a local authority to recognise their role as corporate parents, encouraging them to look at the services and support that they provide through the lens of what a reasonable parent would do to support their own children.'
- 5.7.2 There are seven corporate parenting principles that local authorities must have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and young people, as follows:
- 1) to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;
  - 2) to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
  - 3) to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
  - 4) 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;
  - 5) to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
  - 6) for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and;
  - 7) to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.
- 5.7.3 To ensure that Barnet has due regard to the Principles and improves on the delivery of corporate parenting to children in care and care leavers in Barnet, the administering of council tax relief has been reviewed and a proposed policy consulted on to help care experienced young people have a more successful transition to independence, through the provision of guaranteed relief in their first two years of independent living.
- 5.7.4 Young people, key services and senior officers have developed the proposed policy, which was amended based on feedback received from the care leavers that responded to the public consultation.
- 5.7.5 The introduction of the care leavers council tax policy will help improve the emotional and physical health of care experienced young people and contribute to the achievement of the best outcomes for this cohort.
- 5.7.6 The proposed policy is part of the council's programme of activity to improve its corporate parenting, an area identified as in need of improvement in the July 2017 Ofsted report.

## **5.8 Consultation and Engagement**

- 5.8.1 Engagement has been undertaken with care leavers and practitioners from several services, including Revenues and Benefits, the Leaving Care Team and Barnet Homes, on the extent to which financial pressures caused by

council tax are a barrier to successful independent living, and in particular can lead to rent arrears.

5.8.2 There were a number of key themes that presented which highlighted that care leavers find the transition to independent living challenging and often experience financial hardship as a result of council tax liability, which can lead to rent arrears and loss of tenancy.

5.8.3 A public consultation has been undertaken, the result of which can be found in Appendix B.

## 5.9 **Insight**

5.9.1 The council has reviewed its data on care leavers living in and out of Barnet, and the extent to which council tax relief is currently granted.

## 6. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

6.1 Single Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children Board report, Ofsted, 7 July 2017  
[https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/local\\_authority\\_reports/barnet/051\\_Single%20inspection%20of%20LA%20children%27s%20services%20as%20pdf.pdf](https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/local_authority_reports/barnet/051_Single%20inspection%20of%20LA%20children%27s%20services%20as%20pdf.pdf)