

**REPORT OF** Head of Legal and Governance & Monitoring Officer

**To:** Full Council

**Subject:** Council Tax - Care Leavers Discount Policy

**Date:** 30<sup>th</sup> October 2023

**Reference:**

**PURPOSE OF REPORT:**

For Members to approve the adoption of an Exceptional Hardship Policy, Care Leavers Discount

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The Council has a statutory duty with regards to corporate parenting responsibilities and it is because of this that care leavers have been the subject of joint working discussions within the Devon District.

Devon Leaders and Finance Officers have agreed that a council tax discount scheme for care leavers should be adopted.

S13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 sets out the requirements for Councils to develop and adopt a localised Council Tax Reductions Scheme (CTR). Within the CTR Scheme is an Exceptional Hardship Fund, it is within this policy where the Care Leaver Discount will be referred to. An additional document relating to the Care Leavers Discount has been created.

Members agreed on 04<sup>th</sup> September 2023, in principle, to adopt a Care Leaver Discount. This report is requesting that members agree to the Council Tax Care Leavers Discount within the Exceptional Hardship Fund Policy.

**2. REPORT**

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. As a result, many Councils have introduced a council tax discount for care leavers.

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 or the wider network that most young people can rely on.

The Devon billing authorities and Devon County Council have been working together to agree a Council Tax discount scheme for care leavers with the same qualifying criteria and level of discount across Devon.

It should be noted that the success of the scheme is contingent on the Council receiving accurate data from Devon County Council, initially and on an ongoing basis.



The initial information provided by Devon County Council is below. The data confirmed there are 58 care leavers living in the Torrridge District Council area and potentially liable for Council Tax.

District	Recent Contact	Shared Accommodation (Recent)	No Recent Contact	Total
East Devon	43	14	29	86
Exeter	61	60	65	186
Mid Devon	15	9	18	42
North Devon	35	20	37	92
South Hams	7	4	11	22
Teignbridge	47	3	39	89
Torrridge	23	3	32	58
West Devon	11	2	16	29
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>604</b>
Out of County	174	-	95	269
<b>Total</b>	<b>416</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>873</b>

After cross referencing the information submitted by Devon County Council with our records, the number of care leavers who are affected by a council tax charge is currently 12.

After investigating the accounts, ensuring relevant national discounts/exemptions have been applied, should a Policy be agreed to grant a 100% discount, the cost for the billing year 2023/2024 would be £8,130.19. Torrridge District Council's proportion of this amount would be 8% (£650.42), the remaining cost would be borne by the preceptors (Devon County Council, Police and Fire Services).

There will, of course, be an ongoing financial impact as young people enter and leave the care system and go on to become care leavers. The discount policy would only be applied up to the care leaver reaching the age of 25 years old.

It is critical that DCC provides age profiled data regularly to enable all districts to plan well in advance, providing an understanding of future costs to be factored into annual budget planning processes.

Devon Revenues and Benefits Managers will continue to work together with Devon County Council to implement and monitor an effective and consistent process.

As stated, it is proposed that the Council will award a council tax discretionary discount of up to 100% up to the care leaver's 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. The discount will be awarded after the entitlement to all other national discounts, exemptions and Council Tax Reduction has been assessed. The discount will only apply to care leavers living in Devon, with Devon County Council supporting the care leavers who live outside of the county.

By taking a uniform approach, we will be supporting all Devon care leavers by implementing a scheme which does not stigmatise them and provides a simple process which all care leavers can access.



### 3. **IMPLICATIONS**

#### Legal Implications

It is considered that the approval, for this policy accords with the Council's statutory responsibility as a corporate parent under the Children's Act, 2004

Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended) gives the Council discretion to adopt a localised scheme by individual cases or by class.

#### Financial Implications

These are contained in the report

#### Human Resources Implications

None directly applicable to this report

#### Sustainability/Biodiversity Implications

None directly applicable to this report

#### Equality/Diversity

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.

#### Risk Management

None directly applicable to this report

#### Compliance with Policies and Strategies

The Council Tax Exceptional Hardship Policy, Care Leavers Discount, will be in line with Torridge District Council's corporate parenting responsibilities

#### Data Protection (GDPR) Implications

Suitable Data Sharing Agreements will need to be set up between Torridge District Council and Devon County Council

#### Climate Change

None directly applicable to this report

#### Lead Member Views

Date of Consultation - 17.10.23

By Cllr Simon Newton, Lead Member for Legal and Democratic Support:

I fully support this initiative



#### 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members agree for a Council Tax Care Leavers Policy.

#### **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Consultations:	Officers Consulted	Steve Hearse, Chief Executive; Sean Kearney, Head of Communities & Place; Gordon Bryant, Finance Manager (S151); Sandra Mounce, Revenues & Benefits Team Leader; Jo Wells, Revenues & Benefits Manager
Contact Officer:	Staci Dorey, Head of Legal and Governance & Monitoring Officer	
Background Papers:		

