

# **BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **REPORT TO CABINET**

**27 MARCH 2018**

### **REPORT OF THE HEAD OF FINANCE AND SECTION 151 OFFICER**

#### **COUNCIL TAX CARE LEAVER DISCOUNT**

##### **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to recommend for approval the proposed criteria for applying a Care Leaver's Discount

##### **2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan/Other Corporate Priority**

- 2.1 The outcome of this Scheme is aligned to:-
- Helping people to be more self-reliant – To provide help so that Care Leavers to be able to support themselves and live independently.

##### **3. Background**

- 3.1 Corporate parenting is a statutory function of the Council. The underlying principle is that every local authority will seek the same outcomes for children and young people in care that every good parent would want for their own children.
- 3.2 A 2015 report by The Children's Society (The Wolf at the Door. How council tax debt collection is harming children) suggests that care leavers are a particularly vulnerable group for council tax debt. It found that when care leavers move into independent accommodation and they begin to manage their own budget fully for the first time that this is challenging time for care leavers, particularly if they are falling behind on their council tax. The Children's Society report made a number of recommendations, including Page 2 of 4 making care leavers eligible for council tax discount. This would help to relieve some of the initial pressure and would sit alongside a number of other financial support arrangements available to care leavers.

##### **4. Current situation / Proposal**

- 4.1 Under Section 13A (1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as inserted by Section 76 of the Local Government Act 2003), the Council has the power to reduce liability for council tax in relation to individual cases or

class(es) of cases that it may determine. There is currently no specific exemption class for care leavers in Council Tax legislation. Consequently the only way to achieve an exemption for liable care leavers is to grant a discretionary discount under section 13a (1) (c).

- 4.2 It is proposed that the discount will apply to all care leavers living in Bridgend County Borough as defined by the definition of a care leaver in the Children (Care Leavers) Act 2000 and that it should apply from April 1 2018.
- 4.3 Discussions have taken place between the relevant service areas (Revenues and Benefits and Social/Children Services) to ensure that all those who would potentially benefit from the discount are identified.
- 4.4 It is estimated that the actual numbers of individuals that will qualify is relatively small due to care leavers living in supported accommodation or houses of multiple occupation and not personally liable. Currently 22 have been identified as potentially being eligible.

## **5 Effect upon Policy Framework & Procedures Rules.**

- 5.1 None.

## **6 Equality Impact Assessment**

- 6.1 Not required

## **7 Financial Implications**

- 7.1 The cost of awarding Section 13A (1)(c) discounts has to be funded from within the total income generated by council tax. It is anticipated that the overall total cost of this award for care leavers will not exceed £20,000.

## **8 Recommendations**

- 8.1 That Cabinet recommends that Council:
  - Approves the proposed criteria for applying a Care Leaver Discount as indicated in Appendix A;
  - Delegates authority to the Chief Finance Officer to make decisions on valid applications received which meet the criteria in Appendix A.

**Gill Lewis**  
**Head of Finance & Section 151 Officer**  
**27 March 2018**

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**Background documents: None**

Appendix A

## APPENDIX A

### Criteria

#### Definition of care leaver

As detailed in the Children (Care Leavers) Act 2000.

*Resident in BCBC and has been in the care of a local authority (look after) for a period or cumulative periods equalling at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and which ended on or after their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday.*

#### Council Tax liability

- If the care leaver is fully liable in their own right or with a partner.
- If the care leaver moves in with others / an existing household but is not liable.

#### Application process

- The Council will review care leavers who are not receiving full Council Tax Reduction
- Application for discount made by Care Leaver / Social Care detailing personal circumstances
- Detail of other occupiers will be noted if appropriate
- The Council will ensure that all other discounts, exemption, reliefs are explored first
- Consider award

### Criteria

- Applicable from April 1 2018 or later\*
- The care leaver be living in the borough and meet the definition of a care leaver as above
- If they are liable they must be meet the definition in Section 6 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 'persons liable to pay Council Tax'.

\*any arrears prior to this date will still be payable but we can agree repayment plan

#### Award

- If the care leaver is liable and receives full Council Tax Reduction no discount will be required
- If the care leaver is liable and has full or joint liability for Council Tax an award will be made to ensure they do not have to pay Council Tax
- If the care leaver moves into a household and liable for Council Tax they will be a disregarded person.
- The award will be made up to the age of **21**

#### Process

- Determination of entitlement/awards will be made in the Revenues and Benefits team
- An appeals process will be provided if the customer disagrees with our decision in line with our current policy.