

TITLE	Care Leavers Council Tax update
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 22 May 2018
WARD	(All Wards);
DIRECTOR	Interim Director of People Services - Paul Senior

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The Corporate Parenting Board is committed to developing a 'Local Offer' of services to Care leavers as directed in the Children and Social Work Bill 2017. A range of services and commitments are being developed through the board to improve our offer to care leavers aged 18 years to 25 years.

The Department for Education has highlighted best practice and this includes Local Authorities who provide council tax exemption to 25 years for Care leavers.

The positive start we can give our young people as their corporate parent, has a direct impact upon securing positive outcomes in life and avoiding the need to rely on public services in the future for themselves and for their families.

RECOMMENDATION

Overview and Scrutiny are to note the update briefing.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Council tax exemption up to the age of 21 years was approved by Council at the end of March 2018. Cllr Mark Ashwell who was Lead Member for Children's Services presented the papers and proposal and the content of the papers had been before Overview and Scrutiny.

It was agreed that an initial proposal would be for Council tax exemption to be given up to the age of 21 years, with a further piece of work and scoping to be undertaken on the exemption being extended to 25 years.

The scoping to 25 years is incomplete, although initial findings suggest that mechanisms such as a sliding scale of financial relief/ exemption, and/or means testing and financial re assessment will prove costly to administer. There is a likelihood that the administration of such arrangements would be disproportionate to the scheme.

Models from other Local authorities who have an exemption scheme to 25 years will be reviewed and we are in discussion with our neighbours as to their approach. This will be discussed and progressed through Corporate Parenting Board.

The agreement to Council tax exemption came right at the end of the financial year 2017/18. Agreement was not made in time to prevent the issuing of council tax bills, which are usually sent out a month or six weeks before the first of the month.

The service manager for Corporate parenting is working with the Revenue and Benefits department to put the proposal into action and to backdate if possible this exemption. In addition, we are contacting Local Authorities in which we might establish reciprocal agreements for council tax exemption to ensure care leavers outside the Borough are able to access this benefit.

On 19th April, Mark Riddell from the Department of Education visited Wokingham and undertook a workshop to discuss ideas for care leavers support and the development of our 'Local Offer'. Mark would wish to attend a Corporate parenting Board in the summer to discuss how Wokingham Children's Services progresses plans including council tax exemption to 25 years.

There are 14 care leavers aged between 18 years and 21 years who are eligible and registered to pay council tax. This is of course a snap shot and can change when circumstances change for young people or indeed young people turn 18 or 21 years throughout the year. Based upon financial modelling, the maximum amount to pay if all care leavers were eligible to pay would be approximately £66K per year, but based upon 14 care leavers aged 18 years -21 years exempted from council tax based on average band D council tax of £1,741 x 14 = **£24,374 per year**.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£66K approx		Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£66K approx		Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£66K approx		Revenue

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including properties and priorities?)
Corporate Parenting Board will progress the plans under the development of a Local Offer.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

List of Background Papers

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