

Report for: Cabinet

Date of Meeting:	01 August 2023
Subject:	Care Leavers Discount
Cabinet Member:	Cllr James Buczkowski, Cabinet Member for Finance
Responsible Officer:	Andrew Jarrett Deputy CEO & S151 and Dean Emery, Corporate Manager
Enclosures:	Care Leavers Discount Policy

Executive Summary

The policy outlines the Council's approach to grant discretionary reductions in liability for Council Tax under S13a (1) (c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 in respect of specified care leavers within the Council's area. The Council has the ability to reduce liability in relation to individual cases or class(es) of cases.

Recommendation(s):

- 1. Cabinet are requested to recommend to full Council the adoption of the care leavers discount policy.**
- 2. Delegated authority is given to the Corporate Manager for Revenues, Benefits & Corporate Recovery to make technical scheme amendments to ensure it meets the criteria set by the Council (4.0 in policy)**

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Under Council Tax legislation the Council can set local discounts that apply to certain properties and/or certain groups of people.
- 1.2 Definition of Care Leaver for this policy is found at (3.7 & 3.8) within the policy document.
- 1.3 Discounts to apply until the care leaver turns 25 years old. From this date no discount will apply and the care leaver will be liable to pay any council tax due after any discounts, disregards and Council tax reduction.

- 1.4 If approved the discount will take effect from 1st April 2023 for those liable at that date, this may result in an overpayment which will be refunded.
- 1.5 The policy will be monitored by two officers with Revenues and Benefits, one being the Welfare Officer.
- 1.6 The benefits of introducing this policy are:
- Greater customer care for a vulnerable group
 - Care leaver has sight of a bill and gains understanding of council tax
 - Reduces the chance of recovery notices being sent
 - Removes the need for a care leaver to pass on bills to 'children services'
 - Helps the Council engage with the care leaver, allowing Mid Devon's Welfare Officer to contact them and assist with the pressures of daily life
 - Brings Mid Devon District Council in line with other Authorities, both locally and nationally.

2.0 Financial Implications

- 2.1 The discount is paid under regulation 13a (1) (c) within the Local Government Finance Act 1992. Warding reductions under this regulation means that Mid Devon District Council takes 100% of the cost. All statutory reductions will be applied before Care Leaver Discount.
- 2.2 The total estimated cost of implementing the policy for the care leavers currently in the district is c£17k. This equates to an approximate £4k amount annually, however costs will change as care leavers become liable and receive the discount and turn 25 years old where no discount will be awarded. Whilst there are currently 15 care leavers, only 6 will qualify for a discount. The others are not liable or already have reductions within Council Tax legislation.

3.0 Legal Implications

- 3.1 It is considered that the approval of this policy accords with the Council's statutory responsibility as a corporate parent under the Children's Act, 2004 and the Children's and Social Work Act, 2017. In its Care Leavers Strategy 'Keep on Caring; Supporting Young People from Care to Independence (2016)', the Government encouraged local authorities to consider exempting care 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.

Risk Assessment: There are no known risks.

Impact on Climate Change: Less paper bills to be issued by delivering a more automated approach between Devon County Council and Mid Devon District Council.

Equalities Impact Assessment: The Care Leavers Discount Policy supports the Council in meeting its Equality Objectives, notably “Overcoming the problems faced by vulnerable individuals caused by rural isolation.” It may also contribute to the council’s objective “Overcoming the effects of multiple disadvantage in families with complex needs.”

Relationship to Corporate Plan: Helps Mid Devon to support customers and vulnerable households, bringing the Council and community closer together by working in partnership with other councils.

Statutory Officer sign-off

Statutory Officer: Andrew Jarrett

Agreed by or on behalf of the Section 151

Date: 24/07/2023

Chief Officer: Stephen Walford

Agreed by or on behalf of the Chief Executive/Corporate Director

Date: 24/07/2023

Cabinet member notified: Yes

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

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Background papers: Care Leavers Policy