

For publication

Local offer for children in care and care leavers

Meeting: Council

Date: 18 December 2019

Cabinet portfolio: Health and Wellbeing

Report by: Assistant Director – Policy and Communications

For publication

1.0 Purpose of report

1.1 To seek approval for Chesterfield Borough Council to support and commit to a countywide (Derbyshire excluding Derby City) local offer for children in care and care leavers.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 That the council tax discretionary discount for eligible Derbyshire care leavers aged 18 – 25 is applied from 1 April 2020 and the Care Leaver discretionary discount policy is approved.

2.2 That the other elements of the local children in care and care leaver offer (active fostering, employment, skills, apprenticeships and work experience, housing and

recruitment of foster carers/supported lodgings) come into force with immediate effect.

- 2.3 That Chesterfield Borough Council continues to work with Derbyshire County Council, Derbyshire districts/boroughs and other partners to further develop and improve the children in care and care leaver offer/care leaver covenant for Derbyshire.
- 2.4 That a review of the Chesterfield Borough Council elements of the local care leaver offer is undertaken on an annual basis for affordability and effectiveness.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 There are approximately 70,000 to 80,000 children in care in England at any one time. At the time of writing this report there are 826 children in care across Derbyshire, 144 of these children are from Chesterfield Borough.
- 3.2 There are unique challenges that children in care and care leavers face. Nationally approximately 60% of children become looked after due to abuse or neglect and they have poorer educational and health outcomes than their peers. When young people leave care, many face considerable disadvantage in their lives. Whilst most young people continue to rely upon their families well into early adulthood and beyond, young people leaving care, often do not have this support.
- 3.3 The care system is not just about keeping children safe, but should also promote recovery, resilience and well-being. This provides the context for Section 2 of the Children and Social Care Act 2017 which requires each local authority (including District/Borough Councils) to publish a Local Offer for care leavers aged 18 – 25. Through the Derbyshire Chief Executives Group and the newly formed Corporate Parenting Board,

Derbyshire County Council and District/Borough Councils agreed to collaborate to create one single 'Local Children in Care and Care Leaver Offer' for Derbyshire (excluding Derby City).

- 3.4 This report was considered at the Cabinet meeting on 3 December, 2019, where it was resolved to recommend to full Council that the recommendations at paragraphs 2.1 – 2.4 above be approved.

4.0 Eligibility and numbers

- 4.1 A care leaver is eligible for the local care leaver if they are over 18 years old and under 25 years old and before reaching 18 were in the care of Derbyshire County Council for a period of 13 weeks (or periods amounting to 13 weeks) which began after reaching the age of 14 years and includes at least one day whilst they were 16 or 17 years old. The exception to this is if the applicant had a planned return home to their family or carer which was successful for more than six months.

- 4.2 The table below shows the current known number of care leavers across Derbyshire:

District	18 years old	19 years old	20 years old	21 years old	Total
Amber Valley	8	11	12		31
Bolsover	3	3	5		11
Chesterfield	20	9	14		43
Derbyshire Dales	3	2	1		6
Erewash	8	16	12	1	37
High Peak	9	6	10		25
North East	9	5	3	1	18

Derbyshire					
South Derbyshire	5	7	6		18
Total	65	59	63	2	189

4.3 At the age of 21 care leavers have the right to access additional support services from the County Council and via the local offer but unfortunately accurate figures are not available for this cohort. It is estimated that the total number of eligible care leavers in Chesterfield is around 85 aged 18 – 25. The number of children in care has however for a number of years been rising so this figure is likely to increase on an annual basis.

5.0 Derbyshire local children in care and care leaver offer

5.1 Officer working group meetings have been held to discuss proposals based on lessons learned from early adopters of local offers including Nottinghamshire.

5.2 The offer includes a range of provisions including:

- Discretionary discount from Council Tax for Derbyshire care leavers
- Active fostering and care leavers physical activity programme
- Employment, skills, apprenticeships and work experience
- Housing
- Recruitment of foster carers/ supported lodgings

6.0 Discretionary discount from council tax for Derbyshire care leavers

6.1 Managing budgets can be challenging for many people, particularly for people on low incomes. A 2015 report by the Children’s Society (the wolf and the door – how Council Tax

debt collection is harming children) suggests that care leavers are a particularly vulnerable group for Council Tax debt. This is linked to the fact that unlike many young people, care leavers cannot rely on the continued support of their families as they move into young adulthood.

- 6.2 This discretionary discount of council tax offer applies to eligible care leavers aged 18 – 25 who become liable for council tax for a dwelling in Chesterfield borough. The discount will be awarded on the main residence of the care leaver up until their 25th birthday and will equate to 100% of their liability for council tax after all other relevant discounts have been applied. Where a care leaver is jointly liable a proportionate award will be made according to their individual circumstances e.g. if there is one other occupier than a 50% discount will apply.
- 6.3 The policy attached at Appendix 1 explains how this discretionary discount will work in practice. The council tax discretionary discount will come into force from 1 April 2020.

7.0 Active fostering and care leaver physical activity programme

- 7.1 It is well documented how physical activity improves overall health and wellbeing. Since 2007 Chesterfield Borough Council has delivered, on behalf of Derbyshire County Council, a 'free access to leisure centres' scheme (gym and swim) for children in the care of Derbyshire County Council, their carers and the carers own children. In March 2008 the scheme was broadened to provide care leavers with free access to the fitness gym and swimming up to the age of 25. The cost of the scheme is fully funded by Derbyshire County Council.
- 7.2 In addition Chesterfield Borough Council revised its concessions policy for all services including leisure centres and theatres to provide concessionary rates for care leavers amongst other groups.

8.0 Employment, skills, apprenticeships and work experience

- 8.1 Working whether paid or unpaid, is good for our wellbeing. It contributes to our happiness, helps us to build confidence and self esteem and allows us to build supportive relationships and friendships with our colleagues. Employment can improve health by increasing social capital, enhancing psychological wellbeing, providing income and reducing negative health impacts of economic hardship.
- 8.2 Despite reforms over a number of years to improve the educational attainment of children in care, it is still the case that only 14% of children in care achieved five GCSEs (A* – C), compared to 53% of all children (Department of Education, 2015). Looked after children are five times more likely to be temporarily excluded from School (Department of Education, 2018) and are far more likely to have special educational needs by age 11 (59% for children in care compared with 17% for other children, Department of Education 2018). These challenges can limit options available to care leavers when they leave education.
- 8.3 The wider care leaver offer will need to think creatively about how to provide the opportunities for care leavers to catch up on education that they have missed out on; and to develop the essential knowledge and skills that will enable them to progress. District/Borough councils can assist by working with Derbyshire County Council’s Children’s leaving care service to actively signpost care leavers to apprenticeships, work placements, work experience and mentoring opportunities within our own and partner organisations.

9.0 Housing

- 9.1 Housing services will not make any decision regarding a care leaver being intentionally homeless without consulting their leaving care worker. In the event that we do consider a care leaver to be intentionally homeless we have a duty to secure accommodation which will be available to the care leaver to give them a reasonable opportunity for them to find with the assistance of Housing services and their leaving care worker to find alternative accommodation.
- 9.2 All Derbyshire care leavers will be given a local connection to access housing in any district in Derbyshire irrespective of where they have been living. Derbyshire care leavers exiting supported accommodation as a positive move on will be given priority for social housing in Derbyshire.

10.0 Recruitment of foster carers/ supported lodgings

- 10.1 There is a significant national shortfall of foster carers and supported lodgings. Derbyshire County Council currently has approximately 350 active foster families/carers/supported lodgings, far fewer than is needed to meet the rising demand.
- 10.2 Effective and appropriate advertising, marketing and promotion is key to attracting and retaining quality foster carers and supported lodgings across the county. Getting the rights messages and information to a larger audience will help to increase the number of enquiries and successful recruitment. Working with Derbyshire County Council we can actively support the promotion and recruitment of foster carers and supported lodgings through the Council's many and varied communication channels including Your Chesterfield/Our Homes newsletter, website, social media, displays at buildings and intranet for staff.

11.0 Improving our local offer and the care leaver covenant

11.1 In July 2016, the Government published a major policy document 'Keep on Caring' which aimed to support young people from care towards independence. A key policy commitment in the paper was a strategic pledge to introduce a care leaver covenant. The covenant is a promise made by the private, public and voluntary sectors to provide support for care leavers to help them to live independently. Care leaver covenants aim to ensure care leavers:

- Are better prepared and supported to live independently
- Have improved access to employment, education and training
- Experience stability in their lives and feel safe and secure
- Achieve financial stability

11.2 All central government departments have signed the covenant and have agreed specific offers they will deliver. Our Derbyshire local offer goes some way towards contributing to the covenant aims. Following the collaborative approach taken to developing the local children in care and care leaver offer there is some desire to continue to work together to further improve the offer and outcomes as well as considering the widening out of the offer to different sectors and partners under a covenant commitment.

12.0 Equality impact assessment

12.1 An equality impact assessment for these proposals is attached at Appendix 2.

13.0 Financial considerations

13.1 The majority of the offer can be funded and supported via existing budgets and programmes however the Council Tax discretionary discount does add additional financial pressure to Chesterfield Borough Council. As the collection authority we are 100% liable for any shortfall in collection as a result of discounts applied. The normal distribution mechanism would

not apply so this authority would bear 100% of the lost council tax rather than our normal 10% share.

13.2 Experience from other areas of the country and for the four Derbyshire districts that have already applied Council Tax discretionary discount indicates that take up has been low. However, this is likely to increase as the care leaver offer is publicised and awareness raised. The actual financial contribution in the majority of cases is also low as the discretionary discount is applied after other discounts are applied. In many cases the residual liability is the 8.5% contribution gap from the Council Tax Support Scheme, however for those care leavers in work, the discount would represent 100%. For Derbyshire care leavers in Chesterfield the financial contribution for 2020/21 is estimated at £16,000.

14.0 Risk

Description of the Risk	Impact	Likelihood	Mitigating Action	Impact	Likelihood
As this is a Derbyshire wide scheme. Care leavers who did not enter the care of Derbyshire County Council within Chesterfield Borough will be eligible for Council Tax discretionary discount and other provisions if they now live in Chesterfield. Due to accommodation type/availability and amenities in Chesterfield – it can be more attractive to care leavers than other areas. Estimates	M	H	Policy will be reviewed annually regarding affordability. Notice period could be given to suspend or collapse elements of the scheme. All Derbyshire districts and Derbyshire County Council have co-developed the scheme so that care leavers can	M	M

of care leaver numbers could grow over time therefore our financial liability grows.			access an equal equivalent offer across the administrative county of Derbyshire.		
The number of children in care has been on an upward trajectory for several years and continues to rise. The cost per annum of this scheme will rise over the medium term to reflect the increasing number of children in care and care leavers.	M	H	We will review the affordability and effectiveness of the scheme on an annual basis.	M	H
Other groups may request a similar discretionary discount based on vulnerabilities or hardship. Potential for reputational damage and further pressure on finances.	H	H	Key reasons developed for establishing this offer (including the Children and Social Care Act 2017). This will need to be communicated to groups. This is a Derbyshire wide agreed position as a response to corporate parenting responsibilities.	L	M

7.0 Recommendations

- 7.1 That the council tax discretionary discount for eligible Derbyshire care leavers aged 18 – 25 is applied from 1 April 2020 and the Care Leaver discretionary discount policy is approved.
- 7.2 That the other elements of the local children in care and care leaver offer (active fostering, employment, skills, apprenticeships and work experience, housing and recruitment of foster carers/supported lodgings) come into force with immediate effect.
- 7.3 That Chesterfield Borough Council continues to work with Derbyshire County Council, Derbyshire districts/boroughs and other partners to further develop and improve the children in care and care leaver offer/care leaver covenant for Derbyshire.
- 7.4 That a review of the Chesterfield Borough Council elements of the local care leaver offer is undertaken on an annual basis for affordability and effectiveness.

8.0 Reason for recommendations

- 8.1 To fulfil our duties within the Children and Social Care Act 2017 and provide support for vulnerable young people within the care and leaving the care of Derbyshire County Council.

Decision information

Key decision number	889
Wards affected	All

Document information

Report author	Contact number/email
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Appendices to the report	
Appendix 1	Policy - Care Leaver discretionary discount policy
Appendix 2	Equality impact assessment