

# **Somerset West and Taunton Council**

## **Executive - 18 December 2019**

### **Amendment to Income and Arrears Management Policy**

**This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Ross Henley**

**Report Author: Jenny Collins – Revenues Specialist**

#### **1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 This report seeks support for an amendment to our current Income and Arrears Management Policy to include a Council Tax write off for care leavers living within our area who receive Council Tax Support.
- 1.2 A care leaver is defined as a person aged 25 or under, who has been looked after by a local authority for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14; and who was looked after by the local authority at school-leaving age or after that date.
- 1.3 Appendix A of our Income and Arrears Management Policy – Vulnerable Person Protocol includes care leavers as persons who fall within the definition of vulnerable and may need extra assistance in managing daily affairs.
- 1.4 Approval of the Income and Arrears Management Policy is delegated to the Executive.

#### **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 Executive is recommended to approve that for those persons which fall within the definition of a care leaver, living within the District and qualify for Council Tax Support, will have their net Council Tax liability written off for the qualifying period, and delegate authority to the Revenues Specialist to approve individual eligible write-offs in line with this Policy.

#### **3 Risk Assessment**

- 3.1 Officers consider no or very limited risk associated with this decision, therefore no formal risk assessment completed.

#### **4 Background and Full details of the Report**

- 4.1 The Council has been approached by The Children's Commissioner for England, the Chief Executive of The Children's Society, and Somerset County Council to provide support in Council Tax for those care leavers resident in our area.

- 4.2 Care leavers are a particularly vulnerable group who may experience difficulty in budgeting when they move into independent accommodation for the first time and may find themselves part of our recovery process if payments are not received on time.
- 4.3 Many other Local Authorities across the country have already implemented a 100% Council Tax reduction for care leavers through their Council Tax Support schemes. Our Council Tax Support scheme currently exempts those care leavers who are single, have no dependants and have an income of less than £75 a week. The Council has not consulted on options to change the CTS Policy for 2020/21 therefore this policy will need to remain as currently set at this stage until at least March 2021.
- 4.4 We are proposing to remove any Council Tax liability through our Income and Arrears Management Policy where the care leaver -
- Is living with dependants,
  - Is living with other care leavers, and/or
  - Has entitlement to Council Tax Support but their income is more than £75 a week
- 4.5 Where the care leaver is living with other adults we will apportion the write off to reduce the overall liability.
- 4.6 The write off would apply up to the age of 25 and would end the day before their 26<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- 4.7 The write off will only be applied after entitlement to other discounts, including Council Tax Support has been deducted from the liability.
- 4.8 Somerset West and Taunton Council will actively contact our care leavers to encourage take up and we will consider backdated awards.
- 4.9 We intend to apply the write off through our Income and Arrears Management Policy until we are able to consider including this in our Council Tax Support scheme for future years.

## **5 Links to Corporate Strategy**

- 5.1 Our recommendation links to both our homes and communities strategy and that to be a transparent and customer focused Council. We have listened to the recommendation made by our stakeholders and have witnessed the effect of our current scheme on our most vulnerable residents. Applying the write off will support and enable vulnerable members of our community to live independently for the first time without any added pressure or stress from the recovery process.

## **6 Finance / Resource Implications**

- 6.1 Information supplied by the Leaving Care Team at Somerset County Council initially suggests we have up to 16 care leavers within our district area.
- 6.2 Initial system checks within the Revenues & Benefits area confirm all records for care leavers currently claiming Council Tax Support to be resident in Band A properties. After deducting the Council Tax Support the remaining payable charges range between £180 and £600 a year.

6.3 Providing the write off under our Income & Arrears Management Policy the cost is paid through our Collection Fund and shared by SWTC as the billing authority and the other major preceptors (but not towns and parishes). SWTC's share of the cost is estimated as 11.32% for 2019/20 financial year, so estimated in the range of £11 - £68 only.

6.4 The total Council Tax income budget for SWTC in 2019/20 is £9.039m. If the Executive approves this Policy amendment it will not have a material effect on the Council's budget.

## **7 Legal Implications**

7.1 Council Tax administration is covered by The Local Government Finance Act 1992. The Council has the ability within the Act to create local discounts and reduce balances to nil where it sees fit.

## **8 Climate and Sustainability Implications**

8.1 No direct carbon/environmental impacts arising from the recommendations.

## **9 Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications**

9.1 The recommendation is suggested to promote the protection of vulnerable adults and potential dependents, offering additional support whilst they begin to live independently for this first time.

## **10 Equality and Diversity Implications**

10.1 Impact assessment completed and included in Appendix A.

## **11 Partnership Implications**

11.1 Joint working with Somerset County Council to help identify care leavers, however no funding implications.

## **12 Health and Wellbeing Implications**

12.1 Recommendation supports Somerset people being able to live independently.

## **13 Data Protection Implications**

13.1 All data will be processed in accordance with GDPR guidelines.

## **14 Consultation Implications**

14.1 No public consultation undertaken, however the proposal reflects direct approaches from stakeholders as explained in 4.1 above.

### **Democratic Path:**

- **Scrutiny Committee – No**
- **Executive – 18 December 2019**
- **Full Council – No**

**Reporting Frequency: Once only**

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**List of Appendices**

Appendix A	Equalities Impact Assessment
Appendix B	Letter from Children's Commissioner & Chief Executive of The Children's Society
Appendix C	Income and Arrears Management Policy
Appendix D	Vulnerable Person Protocol