
Subject: FW: Letter from Anne Longfield OBE and Mark Russell re. Exempting care leavers from council tax

From: Toby North <Toby.North@childrenssociety.org.uk>

Date: 17 September 2019 at 15:53:46 BST

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Subject: Letter from Anne Longfield OBE and Mark Russell re. Exempting care leavers from council tax

Please see below a letter, sent to you on behalf of Anne Longfield OBE, Children's Commissioner for England; and Mark Russell, Chief Executive of The Children's Society:

September 2019

**Leader of the Council
Councillor Federica Smith-Roberts
Somerset West & Taunton District Council**

Dear Councillor Smith-Roberts,

Re. Somerset West & Taunton District Council exempting care leavers from council tax

We are writing to you jointly regarding one of your most important duties as a Local Authority Leader- your responsibility as a corporate parent to the children in your council's care and the young people who have recently left it. Specifically, we want to highlight one simple way which you can support these young people as they begin their adult lives: by exempting them from paying council tax.

As you will be aware, through the Children and Social Work Act 2017, the Government introduced the requirement for local authorities to publish a 'Care Leaver Offer' which outlines the services for care leavers available within their area. Exempting care leavers from the burden of paying council tax can be an important part of that offer and significantly reduce the stress on young people as they begin to live independently for the first time.

We know that care leavers are a particularly vulnerable group when it comes to council tax debt. Often, when care leavers move into independent accommodation they begin to manage their own budget fully for the first time. The Children's Society's 'Wolf at the Door' report into council tax debt showed that often the pace of escalation of debt by local authorities can be frightening for care leavers: What can start out for many care leavers as falling slightly behind, can very quickly escalate to a court summons and enforcement action being taken.

Many authorities have already implemented some form of exemption to ensure that care leavers don't need to worry about council tax when they first live independently, whilst the Scottish and Welsh Governments have done so across their devolved nations. In England, we are aware of around 100 authorities who have introduced an exemption for care leavers; so if your authority is one of those which has, we would like to thank you for your leadership on this important issue. If not, we would ask you to consider implementing one as a matter of priority.

However, we are writing to all local authorities regarding this important issue because we are aware of young people even in those areas with an exemption in place, who are not seeing the benefits of the policy: in some areas, exemptions are too short term and young people leaving care remain vulnerable to falling into council tax debt. In other areas across

the country, care leavers are not benefiting because they are placed in accommodation out of borough, or because they choose to move for work or study (as all young people should be able to do).

We would therefore like to jointly ask you:

1. Does your authority exempt care leavers from council tax to give them the best possible start to adult life? If not, will you consider it as a matter of priority?
2. If you have an exemption in place, or are currently considering implementing one, will you ensure that the policy you implement is a full exemption up to the age of 25 years?
3. Will you work to ensure that care leavers are exempt from council tax wherever they are placed in accommodation or choose to live? If a care leaver moves out of your area, will you work with their new home authority to ensure they remain exempt, and will you exempt care leavers from other authorities now living in your area?

In making these changes, you would be supporting some of the most vulnerable young people in your area, as well as meeting your obligation to support care leavers as their corporate parent up until the age of 25 years.

Thank you for considering this matter and should you have any questions or require further information about exempting care leavers from council tax, please contact Toby North, Senior Public Affairs Officer at The Children's Society: toby.north@childrenssociety.org.uk or 020 7841 7254. We look forward to receiving your response to the above questions in due course.

Yours Sincerely,



Anne Longfield OBE, Children's Commissioner for England



Mark Russell, Chief Executive, The Children's Society

Visit our website at <http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk>

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