

Report to Council



Date of Meeting	13 th October 2021
Portfolio	Cabinet Member for Corporate Delivery
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Public/Private Document	Public

Council Tax Discount for Care Leavers

Executive Summary

1. This report seeks approval to amend the criteria to the Council Tax Discount Scheme for Care Leavers.

- 1.1 This report has previously been considered by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 14th September 2021 and by Cabinet on 21st September 2021. The proposals were supported by members at both meetings.

Recommendation

2. That Council approves the changes to the criteria for the 100% council tax discount scheme for care leavers who live in the borough aged 18 to 25 with effect from 1st November 2021.

Reason for Recommendation

- 3.1 On 1 March 2017, Council introduced a 100% council tax discount scheme for care leavers who live in the Borough aged 18 to 20 years.
 - 3.2 On 12 December 2018, Council extended the scheme to care leavers who live in the Borough to aged 18 to 25 years. This reflected the Government change to extend the Council's corporate parenting responsibility to 25 years.
 - 3.3 A care leaver was defined as a person who has been in the care of the local authority for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who was in care on their 16th birthday.
 - 3.4 All Greater Manchester authorities agreed to provide a council tax discount scheme using this definition.

- 3.5 Because the definition excludes those care leavers who go into care after their 16th birthday these care leavers aren't eligible for the council tax discount and so the other Greater Manchester authorities have agreed to amend their council tax discount schemes using the following definition:
- 3.6 A person who has been in the care of the local authority for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, including some time after their 16th birthday.

Key Points for Consideration

4. Corporate parenting is a statutory function of the Council. The underlying principle is that every local authority will seek the same outcomes for children and young people in care that every good parent would want for their children.

Children and young people who are looked after by their local authority rather than their parents are amongst the most vulnerable groups in our community. Outcomes for this group are generally poor and, as corporate parents, the Council has the responsibility to keep them safe, make sure their experiences in care are positive and improve their on-going life chances.

A report by The Children's Society (The Wolf at the Door. How council tax debt collection is harming children) suggests that care leavers are a particularly vulnerable group for council tax debt. It found that often, when care leavers move into independent accommodation, managing their own budget fully for the first time can be challenging for care leavers, particularly if they fall behind on their council tax payments.

This is true for the majority of care leavers in Rochdale who are responsible for payment of council tax and the council tax discount scheme for care leavers was introduced to alleviate the challenges faced by care leavers.

Care Leavers who have no recourse to public funds will be excluded from the discount.

4.1 Alternatives Considered

The council tax discount scheme for care leavers could remain as present. The outcome being that Rochdale care leavers are treated differently to other Greater Manchester authorities and they potentially accrue debt at an earlier age at the outset of their independent lives which the Council is compelled to pursue with the detrimental impacts this could cause.

Costs and Budget Summary

5. 130 care leavers are currently receiving a council tax discount at an annual cost of £145,023.68. It is anticipated that the proposed change will increase the annual cost but not significantly.

Risk and Policy Implications

6. The change to the policy will benefit all those care leavers living in the Rochdale area irrespective of their age, gender or all other categories. An equality impact assessment was undertaken in September 2018. This has been reviewed and the proposed change to the eligibility criteria for the council tax discount does not impact on this.

Consultation

7. None required.

Background Papers	Place of Inspection
8. None	

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