

Committee Title: People and Health Overview Date: Report Title: Care Leaver Financial Policy

Choose an item.

Portfolio Holder: Cllr A Parry, Children, Education, Skills and Early Help

Local Councillor(s):

Executive Director: T Leavy, Executive Director of People - Children

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Report Status: Public

Recommendation:

People and Health Overview Committee support the adoption of the Care Leaver Financial Offer

Reason for Recommendation:

The recommendations in this report support Dorset having a clear framework, which sets out financial entitlements for Care Leavers, defines the value for a setting up home allowance, which is statutory guidance.

1. Executive Summary

At present our Care Leavers receive a range of financial support through the Care Leaver budget. This support covers all aspects of a Care Leaver's life as they move into adult life.

This financial support is currently allocated on a case by case basis; either when a Care Leaver asks for it, or when their Personal Adviser identifies the need for it. At present, Dorset does not have a clear framework, which sets out financial entitlements for Care Leavers, and has not had a defined value for a setting up home allowance.

Although based on individual needs of care leavers, this has meant that finances provided can vary from person to person which may not be equitable for all. This paper sets out how Dorset Council will provide a clear and equitable financial offer to Care Leavers.

2. Financial Implications

Financial modelling, based on our current cohort of Care Leavers, indicates a projected pressure on the Care Leavers budget of £24,866 for 2021-22 if the offer is implemented. This projected pressure is proposed to be funded from the currently unspent £48,378 of the New Burdens, Care Leaver 21-25 Grant. This could be used to offset the projected overspend in the financial year 2021-22 and 2022-23.

3. Well-being and Health Implications

The Financial Framework sets out important financial support to assist in the health and well-being of Care Leavers. Although much of this support is not directly health related, it is recognised that having a safe place to live, support to access education and work and financial help in a time of shortage are all important to the well-being of our Care Leavers.

4. Climate implications

None

5. Other Implications

None

6. Risk Assessment

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:
Current Risk: Medium
Residual Risk: Low

7. Equalities Impact Assessment

The Care Leaver Financial Framework sets out how we will provide financial support to Care Leavers in Dorset. Although Care Leavers are a vulnerable group in and of themselves, the framework also makes additional provision for

several groups of young adults with protected characteristics. This includes additional support to young people with a disability and Care Leavers who are pregnant.

8. Appendices

Appendix 1: Spreadsheet outlining the detailed financial provision available to Care Leavers

9. Background Papers

9.1. Context:

9.1.1. Young people cease to be looked after at the age of 18, although some children in care may choose to leave care before this we positively encourage young people to stay in a supportive care arrangement until at least this time. However, the local authority continues to have responsibilities towards them until at least the age of 25. These duties and responsibilities vary according to the circumstances of the young person and their length of time in care prior to the age of 16. We currently have 266 young people receiving an active leaving care service.

9.1.2. Feedback from our Care Leavers Forum has indicated that that too many of our young people do not feel they have been equipped with the skills to properly manage their money or to budget effectively. This was echoed by some of the Care Leavers that responded to the New Belongings “Your Life Beyond Care” survey. This is an area that the teams are looking to improve upon this year.

9.1.3. At present our Care Leavers receive a range of financial support through the Care Leaver budget. This support covers all aspects of a Care Leaver’s life as they move into adult life. Additional detail on this financial provision is set out below, but this might include:

- Housing and living independently;
- Access to learning and training, including university;
- Documentation and identity;
- Support with pregnancy and maternity;
- Keeping in touch;
- Emergency Financial Assistance

9.1.4. This financial support is currently allocated on a case by case basis when either a Care Leaver asks for it, or when their Personal Adviser identifies the need for it. At present, Dorset does not have a clear framework, which sets out financial entitlements for Care Leavers, and have not so far operated a defined value for a setting up home allowance.

- 9.1.5. Although based on individual needs of care leavers, this has meant that finances provided can vary from person to person which may not be equitable for all. In order to manage the current budget of £269,000 (2020-2021 financial year) Dorset have been unable to operate a setting up home allowance (Leaving Care Grant) of at least £2000 as recommended by DfE guidance and the Childrens Commissioner.

9.2. Financial Support to care Leavers:

- 9.2.1. The following sets out in more detail the different financial support which is currently provided to Care Leavers in Dorset.

- 9.2.2. **Housing and living independently** – These payments may include a contribution to help a young person to set up home which they can use to purchase electrical goods, kitchen equipment and utensils, bedding and furniture.

In addition, Dorset may also provide the young person with rent in advance and a deposit where they move into Housing Authority properties and help with short term storage and removal costs. Dorset Council has also agreed that Care Leavers are exempt from Council tax where they are in their own property and receive a 25% contribution to council tax where they live in a shared property within the Dorset boundary.

- 9.2.3. **Access to learning and training** – Dorset currently provides financial support in several ways to support Care Leavers to access employment education and training.

Significant investment has gone into encouraging Care Leavers to go to university and this academic year we have 39 Care Leavers enrolled on University courses, all supported by specialist Personal Advisers. Dorset currently provides all Care Leavers at University with an annual bursary of £2000. The national recommendation, and the offer from most local authorities is a £2000 bursary over the course of the degree course.

In certain circumstances Dorset also pays for specific courses or training, including online courses on a full-time or part-time basis. We are also able to provide a contribution to specific equipment or resources such as a laptop, specialist clothing or safety boots. Additionally, we can contribute towards travel to access a specific place of learning or an apprenticeship and help with childcare costs where required.

- 9.2.4. **Documentation and Identity** – Most Care Leavers will have all the documentation they need for adult life but in some cases the Care Leaving Service will pay for the cost of a passport, driving licence or other document as required.

9.2.5. **Support with pregnancy and maternity** – Where a Care Leaver is pregnant or has a baby, financial support is provided to ensure mum has access to maternity clothing and can attend key appointments and maternity classes.

9.2.6. **Keeping in Touch** – Dorset provides financial support to Care Leavers to remain in touch. This includes provision of a Dorset Council SIM card with free calls, text and up to 20GB of data per month and a contribution towards transport to visit family members and significant others.

9.2.7. **Emergency Financial Assistance** – As much as Personal Advisers try to support our Care Leavers to manage their money, there are inevitably times when some of them need additional assistance. These are dealt with on an individual basis and are usually dealt with by a bank transfer, but the team have access to All Pay cards which enable them to make purchases in emergencies including a small supermarket shop.

9.3. Financially related support to Care Leavers:

9.3.1. Beyond the direct financial provision to Care Leavers, there is also significant activity to support Care Leavers to become independent adults. The Care Leaver Service works in partnership with a range of services and organisations to access the help and support to which they are entitled such as benefits and grants as well as advice and guidance into education, employment and training.

9.3.2. The following is not an exhaustive list but is intended to give an insight into the range of activity that Personal Advisers might be involved in to support a Care Leaver.

- Support to claim Universal Credit. The team have recently agreed a joint working protocol with the Bridport and Weymouth Job Centre Plus teams to achieve advance claims for Care Leavers, for any proposed sanctions to be discussed with the Personal Adviser before being applied and identify additional support in finding work
- Support in access to grants and bursaries. The Personal Advisers will help Care Leavers with applications to any which are available. Many colleges and universities have schemes which provide additional financial support to Care Leavers, but there are also charities, local community groups and businesses which do this too.
- Access to work experience and voluntary work for care Leavers interested in a specific field of work, or currently unable to undertake paid work
- Access to a business mentor under a scheme run by the Chamber of Commerce
- The Rees Foundation contributes towards the funding of driving lessons for Care Leavers wishing to learn to drive.
- The Children in Care nurses provide a survival kit on or around a Care Leavers 18th birthday

- Care Leavers are also exempt from Council Tax within Dorset as well as the BCP are and in some other local authority areas.
- This Christmas our Care Leavers also received Winter Food Vouchers.

9.3.3. The Care Leaving service does not currently provide birthday gifts or any gifts around specific festivities such as Christmas, Eid or Diwali. We are also currently unable to assist with any additional winter fuel payments. However, we would aspire to be able to pay this in the future.

9.4. Development of Care Leaver Financial Framework

9.4.1. Considerable work has been done to develop a Care Leaver Financial Framework. This will set out all the different financial support that a Care Leaver is entitled to from Dorset Council.

9.4.2. The framework considers all the areas covered in this report and will shift the financial support provided to Care Leavers from an ad hoc basis to a consistent and equitable offer than can be easily understood by Care Leavers.

9.4.3. The key provisions within the framework are as follows:

- Housing – the most significant provision within the framework is a £2000 setting up home allowance. This will ensure that Dorset complies the DfE guidance and the Childrens Commissioner's recommendation. This allowance will cover the key costs of setting up home as described above and Care Leavers will be able to draw down all the sum as a one off payment or spread it out over several according to what they need.
- Employment, Education and Training – This will cover much of the support outlined in the section above but with defined amounts for each area. In addition, it is proposed that Dorset provide support to Care Leavers during the first year of an apprenticeship. Typically, anyone on the first year of an apprenticeship will receive £4.15 per hour, which is insufficient for a Care Leaver to live independently, so a top up payment would be provided during the first year.
- Emergency Financial Assistance – This is a key change to how Dorset currently provides financial assistance. Rather than responding to requests on an individual 'as and when' basis, the framework allows for each Care Leaver to have a personal budget which they can spend draw down between the ages of 18 and 25 when they need it. This would make the system more equitable to those that manage their money better. If a Care Leaver had used all their Personal Budget, the Care Leaver Service would work with them and could still provide financial assistance if this was deemed necessary.

- Aspirational Financial Provision – Within the developed framework, there are financial provisions which Dorset should aspire to do at a later point. These are costs are not obligations but would fit within the spirit of a Corporate Parent role. These include providing incentives for voluntary work and work experience to support those Not in Employment, Education and Training, providing birthday cards and small gifts at key festivals such as Christmas or Eid, and Cold Weather payments.

9.5. Implementation of the Care Leaver Finance Policy

- 9.5.1. The current budget for the financial support for Care Leavers is £269,000. This has been unchanged for several years, despite the increase in the number of Care Leavers in that time. However, the Care Leaver Service has managed spend within this budget.
- 9.5.2. In addition, Dorset has £48,378 of the New Burdens, Care Leaver 21-25 Grant currently unspent. This could be used to offset the projected overspend in the financial year 2021-22 and 2022-2023.
- 9.5.3. Considerable work has been undertaken to retrospectively apply the £2000 Setting Up Home Grant, looking at monies already received by our current Care Leaver Cohort aged 18-21. The intention would be to 'top up' the grant to Care Leavers currently aged 18-21 who have received less than £2000, spreading the balance of the £2000 over the time until they turn 25.
- 9.5.4. The estimated cost of implementing the proposed financial framework is estimated to be £342,244 in 2021-22. Based on the current budget, and the New Burdens Grant mentioned above, this gives a projected overspend in 2021-22 of £24,866.

9.6. Recommendations

- 9.6.1. That People and Health Scrutiny Committee support the adoption of the Care Leaver Financial Offer from April 2021.

Footnote:

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.