

Care leavers exemption from Council tax

I am writing to ask you to exempt care leavers from paying council tax in your area.

As you will know, children leaving care often struggle with the new financial responsibilities of independence. Some are unaware they even need to pay Council Tax, others don't know how, and many tell me that Council Tax bills are an unexpected and onerous financial burden that can force them into arrears.

Unfortunately, the speed with which Council Tax debt can escalate creates a "lose-lose" situation for everyone. These young people can face court summons and enforcement action very quickly and even eviction. It's not only bad for that care leaver but self-defeating for the local authority who are then have to meet the costs of emergency housing.

The Children's Society raised many of these issues in their *Wolf at the Door* report last year and have since been working with some councils to make positive changes for children leaving care since then.

Taking on new financial responsibilities is part of the move to independence for all young people but care leavers have to face these responsibilities much younger than most and often without family members to fall back on for guidance and support. The Centre for Social Justice found that 57% of care leavers find it difficult to manage money and avoid debt. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has shown that accumulation of debt and threats to tenancies are some of the biggest ongoing issues of concern for care leavers. Research by the Children's Society shows care leavers are three times more likely to have had a benefit sanction – most of which are overturned when challenged.

The Government's Care Leavers' Strategy – *Keep on Caring* encourages Councils to do what any reasonable parent would do to help their children get the best start in adult life. The Children and Families Act encourages Councils to do all they can to support Care Leavers and this has been further enhanced by Section 2 of the Children and Social Work Act which places a statutory duty on Councils to make a clear offer to care leavers. Exempting care leavers from Council Tax is an excellent step towards meeting the spirit of all these obligations in a way that will meaningfully improve the lives of care leavers.

Almost twenty local authorities have now taken this positive step to exempt care leavers from paying Council Tax – most at a cost of no more than £15,000 - £30,000 in lost revenue, which in relative terms means a lesser loss to the council than would be the significant gain to the care leaver. I have, also, anecdotally heard that local authorities have found the move cost neutral because it saves on chasing council tax arrears and on the costs associated with supporting a care leaver who has become statutorily homeless.

I hope that you will now consider this positive move for care leavers in your local authority and remove the requirement to pay Council Tax for care leavers to the age of 25. I would be very grateful if you could inform me of your decision and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anne Longfield". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath.

Anne Longfield

Children's Commissioner for England
