

From: Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education
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To: Corporate Parenting Panel – 27 March 2019

Subject: **Challenge Card Update**

Classification: Unrestricted

<p>Summary: This report provides members with an overview of the progress made on the current challenge cards that our young people have made to KCC, in our role as Corporate Parents.</p> <p>Recommendation: The members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to NOTE the challenge card progress to date and to support the actions being taken to meet the challenges.</p>

1. Previous Challenges – Interview Panel Timings:

- 1.1 A challenge card was received from our young people who are part of Kent County Council's *Recruit Crew* in August 2018 – ***'For Kent County Council to review the timings of when interview panels are set and see if something could be done to better fit in with young people's availability and schooling commitments to ensure that their participation isn't disadvantaged.'***
- 1.2 Young people have advised they wish to get involved in helping shape the services they receive. One of the ways they can do this is to be involved in the recruitment and selection of Social Workers and other senior and key staff.

2. Challenge card progress - Interview Panel Timings:

- 2.1 The Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel previously reviewed the dates and timings of the Corporate Parenting Panel meetings for 2019 and has ensured there are as many dates within school holidays as possible to enable our children and young people to attend the panel and meet their corporate parents. Plans are now in progress by the Participation Team to ensure more children and young people are included in Corporate Parenting Panel meetings whenever possible – with the first being a 'Take Over Corporate Parenting Panel Day'.
- 2.2 The Participation Team have run another Interview Panel training course in the February school holiday in South Kent, with a further 7 young people trained on the accredited course 'Interview Skills for Service Users.' This has given them additional skills and a greater understanding about what is required when supporting the recruitment and selection process. Further courses will run later in the year in other parts of the county.

2.3 Care Leavers, young people in care and those receiving support from Early Help took part in the recruitment process for the first phase of recruitment for the Change for Kent Children programme, interviewing Assistant Director and Senior Officer posts. The young people have asked that it is fed back to Officers how pleased they were that the young person panels took place in the school holidays and after school. This meant that young people who had already undertaken the recruitment and selection training were able to use the skills they had learnt, as many of them are of school age and had not yet been able to be involved in the recruitment process. Feedback from young people was that they really felt very valued and included in the procedure and enjoyed the opportunity, even though some of them were nervous at the outset.

3. New Challenge:

The Young Adult Council would like to raise the following new Challenge:

That all Kent Care Leavers living in Kent should be exempt from paying Council Tax (until the age of 25 if they are still engaging with the 18+ Service)

Background

- 3.1 We know that Care Leavers are a particularly vulnerable group when it comes to Council Tax. Care Leavers, unlike many young adults outside of the care system, experience what Centrepoin calls, 'rapid and crowded transitions to adulthood' where the key milestones that signify being an adult, such as setting up a home, gaining employment and managing personal and household finances all occur at the same time. Often, they must do this at a much younger age than their peers and without the support of family or much previous financial education that might give them a practical understanding of how to budget and pay bills.
- 3.2 Exempting Care Leavers from paying Council Tax would clearly be in keeping with Kent County Council's and the District Councils' statutory roles as Corporate Parents. Introduction of these measures would provide Care Leavers with some of the stability and support they need to help them make progress and live successful independent lives, allowing them valuable years to develop their independent living skills and knowledge of managing money and reducing the chance falling into debt.
- 3.3 If this challenge was successful, Kent would be joining approximately 90 other local authorities, including other two-tier county councils, such as Staffordshire, Cumbria and Nottinghamshire, to give its Care Leavers the best start when they are transitioning to adulthood.

3.4 Research: What are the government and other organisations saying?

- The Centre for Social Justice found that 57% of young people find it difficult managing their money and avoiding debt when they leave care.
- The Children's Society in their report, ['Wolf at the Door: How Council Tax debt collection is harming children'](#) revealed that falling behind with Council Tax payments can be a particularly scary experience for Care Leavers, as the situation can quickly escalate to court summons and enforcement action being taken.

The Children's Society has also lobbied Local Authorities to introduce measures to exempt Care Leavers from paying Council Tax.

- An exemption was also recommended by Centrepoin in their 2017 report, ['From Care to Where.'](#)
- Additionally, the 2016 Government Publication, ['Keep on Caring: Supporting Young People from Care to Independence'](#) recommends providing some financial support for Care Leavers when they first live independently.

3.5 Financial Pressures facing Care Leavers

The Children's Society in their Council Tax Exemption Briefing lists the following financial pressures for Care Leavers:

- The Centre for Social Justice found the 'accumulation of debt, threats to their tenancies and their inability to avoid this through careful budgeting' were issues of continuing concern for Care Leavers.
- The government decided that, from April 2016, work allowances for care leavers without children would be withdrawn altogether. This change costs working care leavers claiming Universal Credit up to £72 per month (£865 per year).
- As a priority bill the enforcement measures available to councils to collect unpaid council tax are severe, which at its most extreme could result in a custodial sentence.
- Rochdale Council when undertaking work to exempt their own Care Leavers from paying Council Tax, found that 77% of their Care Leavers were behind with their Council Tax, whilst Swindon Council noted that 'many' of their Care Leavers had previously been taken to court in order to obtain council tax arrears.

These pressures have been endorsed by the VSK Apprentices and other Kent Care Leavers as genuine burdens they feel are placed upon them.

3.6 What are other Local Authorities doing?

91 Local Authorities have introduced some measures to exempt Care Leavers from paying Council Tax (as listed on [The Children's Society website](#)). Councils have the power to introduce exemptions for council tax for certain groups under Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

There are a variety of models in operation including:

1. Addition of Care Leavers to 'vulnerable' categories in tax reduction schemes – means tested reductions/exemptions or introduction of an eligibility criteria (i.e. Care Leavers undertaking apprenticeships)
2. A partial exemption from paying Council Tax until the age of 21 (i.e. a 50% discount).
3. A partial exemption from paying Council Tax until the age of 25
4. Exemption until the age of 21

5. Exemption until the age of 21 with discretionary means tested discounts/exemptions until the age of 25
6. In October 2017, the Scottish Government announced its intention to exempt care leavers from paying Council Tax. This was followed by the publication of regulations which came into force on 1 April 2018, allowing care leavers (up to the age of 26) to be exempt from Council Tax.

3.7 Corporate Parenting Responsibilities

The Local Authority has statutory corporate parenting responsibilities towards young people who have left care until the age of 25.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 placed corporate responsibilities on district councils for the first time, requiring them to have regard to Children in Care and young people who have left care up to the age of 25.

Considering the number of Local Authorities that are now including council tax exemption as part of their corporate parenting responsibilities, and that it is now also officially a responsibility for District Councils, YAC and Young Care Leavers feel that it is an appropriate time for Kent County Council to consider this for Kent Care Leavers.

Recommendation:

Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to **NOTE** the challenge card progress to date and accept the new challenge card.

4. Background documents

None.

5. Contact details

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