

MAJOR SCRUTINY REVIEW: CHILDREN LEAVING CARE PROCEDURE AND GRANT

Cabinet Member	Councillor David Simmonds
Cabinet Portfolio	Education & Children's Services
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Papers with report	Appendix A: Education & Children's Services Policy Overview Committee Final Report

HEADLINE INFORMATION

Purpose of report	To receive the Education & Children's Services Policy Overview Committee report on the review on the Children Leaving Care Procedure and Grant
Contribution to our plans and strategies	Putting residents first, keeping children safe and supporting children to leave care to permanence without delay.
Financial Cost	The number of Leaving Care grants awarded annually are in the region of 25-30 which would indicate an increase in spend of up to £25,000 should the recommendations be approved. The MTFF for 2013/14 currently before Cabinet for consideration recommends providing an additional £25,000 be provided.
Relevant Scrutiny Committee(s)	Education & Children's Services Policy Overview Committee
Ward(s) affected	N/A

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

1. Welcomes the attached report of the Education & Children's Services Policy Overview Committee on the review into the Children Leaving Care Procedure and Grant.
2. Accepts the recommendations of the Policy Overview Committee as reflected below:

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EDUCATION & CHILDREN'S SERVICES POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

RECOMMENDATION 1: That to assist care leavers making the transition to independent living, that an existing Housing Officer for care leavers be designated to them, to enable a smooth transition and to take forward the following:

- (i) To work with care leavers and their social care officers to discuss in detail their move into their tenancy. This discussion to provide details and advice on the condition and standard of the tenancy they are moving into and advice and guidance on entitlements in relation to decorating and general repairs.
- (ii) To provide advice in relation to the logistics and costs of removals into the new tenancy.
- (iii) To work with care leavers and their social care officers to enable the necessary preparations to be made to enable them to move into their new tenancy within acceptable time-scales.
- (iv) To investigate whether businesses and partners have schemes which could help care leavers with decorating their new tenancies.
- (vi) To provide guidance to care leavers in their Leaving Care Plan on the benefits of joining a credit union or other savings schemes. In addition to include information on the importance of household insurance.

RECOMMENDATION 2: That support be given to a campaign to ask residents to donate household goods to charities such as the Trinity Homeless Project and that care leavers be advised that they could purchase essential items this way.

RECOMMENDATION 3: That consideration be given to a process being set up whereby care leavers who had made the transition to independent living, acted as mentors for new care leavers.

RECOMMENDATION 4: That information on the entitlement of the leaving care grant be given to all Looked after Children, including unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people. This could be promoted through the existing Kids in Care web pages and recorded in the pathway plan of all care leavers who meet the criteria for a grant.

RECOMMENDATION 5: That Officers be asked to investigate the feasibility of changing the current purchasing arrangements of essential items for care leavers to enable them to purchase the items for themselves.

RECOMMENDATION 6: That further work takes place on helping care leavers access the local social fund if required.

RECOMMENDATION 7: That the leaving care grant be increased to a maximum of £1500 (or £1800 for those in exceptional circumstances) and considered as part of the budget planning process for 2013/14 onwards.

INFORMATION

Reasons for recommendation

The objective of the review was to investigate the current leaving care process and grant, and to examine whether the current grant meets the needs of Hillingdon's leaving care population. The grant has not been reviewed since 2003 and remains at £1,000. As Corporate Parents of children in care it is in the best interests of the Council to give care leavers the best possible start in adult life as they move towards independent living.

Alternative options considered / risk management

The Cabinet could decide to reject or amend one or more of the Committee's recommendations.

Supporting Information

The Education & Children's Services Policy Overview Committee began its review into the children leaving care procedure and grant in July 2012 and the terms of reference of the review were as follows:

- To examine the current eligibility for the payment of the Leaving Care Grant
- To review the process of dispensing the grant
- To assess whether the amount of the grant adequately meets the needs of care leavers
- To investigate how this Council's grant compares with its statistical and geographical neighbours
- To make recommendations to Cabinet on the outcome of the review.

The review held meetings on 30 July 2012 and 12 September 2012 when Members heard from two recent care leavers, a foster parent, the Council's Team Manager of the 16+ Leaving Care Team, and the Council's then Deputy Director of Social Care, Health and Housing.

The key issues which were identified for the review were the following

- Care leavers depart the security of their care establishment /placement at a younger age than their peers, usually at the age from 16-18. This is in stark contrast to their peers, who in a family setting will still have the option to return when they leave home. Care leavers have no such safety net.
- Care leavers have to cope with the emotional and practical factors of living independently at a much younger age. They are expected to undertake their journey to adulthood, far younger and in far less time than their peers.
- Care leavers are expected to manage the transition into adulthood whilst maintaining their education /seeking employment and managing their tenancy/accommodation. They are usually not yet established in employment and have no or little access to disposable income which would enable them to take full responsibility for equipping their own homes.
- There is no agreement across the country about how much money a young person should receive as a setting up home grant when they are allocated their first tenancy. However, the Government has recently on the 30th November 2012, in the launch of the Charter for Care Leavers recommended that local authorities consider increasing the grant to at least £2000.
- After the Committee's review, it is recommended to Cabinet that a leaving care grant of £1500 is appropriate, but in exceptional circumstances (i.e mother and baby), £1800 be granted.

Financial Implications

There is already an existing officer within Housing Services who co-ordinates such support to Care Leavers as part of their responsibilities, so there are no additional human resource implications arising from these recommendations.

The number of Leaving Care grants awarded annually are in the region of 25-30 which would indicate an increase in spend of up to £25,000 should the recommendations be approved. The MTFF for 2013/14 currently before Cabinet for consideration recommends an additional £25,000 be provided.

EFFECT ON RESIDENTS, SERVICE USERS & COMMUNITIES

What will be the effect of the recommendation?

The recommendations if agreed will enable a smoother and more successful transition for young people leaving care and provide a grant amount which will give care leavers a better start as they move towards independent living.

Consultation Carried Out or Required

The Committee took evidence from a range of witnesses as described in the review report.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance has reviewed this report and concurs with the financial implications set out above; noting that additional investment in leaving care grants has been included in the draft budget presented to Cabinet on this agenda.

Legal

The Council's statutory duties and functions in respect of children it is 'Looking After' and after they have ceased to be 'Looked After' are set out under Part III of the Children Act 1989.

Under the Council's Constitution Cabinet has the appropriate power to agree recommendations proposed at the outset of this report. Further, by virtue of Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 which makes provision for 'a general power of competence' for local authorities in England. The 'power' gives local authorities the power to do anything an individual can do unless specifically prohibited by law. This includes the power to act in the interest of their communities.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL.