

Fighting for a Fairer Start for Care Leavers

For young people, growing up can be exciting – but it can be daunting, too, to be suddenly faced with paying for rent, bills, and food and dealing with new challenges.

For care leavers, this transition into adulthood can be even more difficult. They have already dealt with so much and often lack the support networks that many of us take for granted. That's why we're campaigning for all care leavers to be exempt from council tax – relieving a huge burden as they begin their adult lives.

Thanks to our calls for change, this exemption is already national policy in Scotland and Wales, and most local authorities in England have followed suit. Now, it's time for every council to get on board so that all care leavers get the right support, wherever they live.

What is the council tax exemption?

Fatima campaigned for her local authority Croydon Council to implement the exemption. Here's what she had to say: *"The council tax exemption for care leavers is a relief from paying council tax between the age of 18 and 25. Across England, roughly two thirds of local authorities implemented this exemption. It means care leavers don't need to worry about hefty council tax bills as they move into independent living. I'm proud to say my council – Croydon - is one of them.*

*As a Children in Care champion, I helped make it happen. **The relief lessened my money worries and allowed me to focus on my rent, living costs and savings. Sadly, not all councils have introduced the exemption. In some areas, young people are carrying mounting council tax debt with the constant worry of further bills and fines.** I'm working with The Children's Society, campaigning for transparent, reliable, and consistent council tax exemption policies across all local authorities in England".¹*

Corporate parenting responsibility

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 says that when a child or young person comes into the care of the local authority or is under 25 and was looked after by the authority for at least 13 weeks after their 14th birthday, the authority becomes their corporate parent. This means that they should:

- act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people;
- encourage them to express their views, wishes and feelings, and take them into account, while promoting high aspirations and trying to secure the best outcomes for them;
- make sure they have access to services;
- make sure that they are safe, with stable home lives, relationships and education or work;
- prepare them for adulthood and independent living.

As corporate parents, it's every councillor's responsibility to make sure that the council is meeting these duties towards children in care and care leavers.

Every councillor and officer within a council has a responsibility to act for those children and young people as a parent would for their own child.²

¹ [The Children's Society - The Reality of Leaving Care](#)

² [Local Government Association - Corporate Parenting Guide](#)

Guidance for Local Authorities

The Department for Education issued statutory guidance for local authorities on supporting children in care and care leavers. They referenced our campaign to exempt care leavers from the burden of council tax as an example of best practice in the many councils that have adopted the policy already.

The guidance states “the experiences of looked-after children and care leavers, particularly in regard to whether they feel cared for and listened to, will therefore be an important measure of how successfully local authorities embed the principles.³” Whilst exempting care leavers from council tax is only a small part of support that local authorities can offer, we have found that care leavers, like Fatima, say relieving them of the burden of paying council tax as they begin to transition into adulthood, often without any family support can be a huge relief.

Cost of living

A report from the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum found only 15% of care leavers who responded to their survey about the cost of living crisis have regular financial support - this shows how care experienced young people are in a uniquely disadvantaged position to young people generally, in terms of having financial support and a financial ‘safety net’.

They further found that:

- **82%** of care leavers said they were struggling to afford food all or some of the time;
- **64%** had seen their levels of debt increase;
- **31%** said they were at risk of homelessness;
- **14%** said they had put themselves in a vulnerable position, such as shoplifting, to afford the essentials.⁴

Who else is on board?

In relaunching this campaign, we have conducted an FOI exercise of all English local authorities to see the status of each English local authority. In addition to the Welsh and Scottish Governments already adopting this as a policy, we found the following had adopted the policy in full:⁵

	Unitaries	Counties	Districts
Full exemption up to 25	75%	58%	49%
Full exemption inclusive of care leavers who move in to the local authority	23%	10%	20%
Full exemption inclusive of care leavers who live outside of the local authority	28%	29%	8%
Partial exemption of some kind	85%	81%	68%

Next steps

You can find a copy of the [model motion here](#). We’d love to speak to you and offer support for you to take it to your next council meeting to adopt. For more information, please contact Local Public Affairs Manager, Georgia Power – georgia.power@childrenssociety.org.uk

³ [Department for Education - Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities](#)

⁴ [National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum - Survival is Not Easy](#)

⁵ Data collected by The Children’s Society from September – November 2023