

**20 September 2022****TITLE OF REPORT: Financial Support offer to Care Experienced young people**

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**Purpose of the Report**

1. To seek the views of the Corporate Parenting Board on the current offer of financial support for care leavers. This will include areas around financial support, financial education and advice and readiness for independent living.

**Background**

2. Due to the current cost of living crisis and ongoing issues around financial support for children who are care experienced the service and corporate parenting board agreed that a review of the current offer was needed. It was also agreed that this needed to consider the financial education offered to care experienced young people and general preparation for living independently.
3. To place our current offer within a local context we undertook a bench marking exercise to look at Gateshead's Local Offer to our care experienced young people and how this compares to the offer from neighbouring authorities. These are listed below.

	Gateshead	Newcastle	Sunderland	S/Tyneside	N/Tyneside	Darlington
<b>Accommodation Financial Support:</b>						
Council Tax Exemption	x	x	x	x	x	x
Setting Up Home Allowance	£2000	£2000	£3000	£2300	£2000	£2000
Starter Pack (first home)	x			x		
TV License	1 <sup>st</sup> TV license			1 <sup>st</sup> TV License		
Winter Fuel Payment	x £30 per month Nov-Mar			x		x
<b>EET Financial Support:</b>						
Higher Education Finance (Virtual School)	£2000	£2000	£2000	£2000	£2000	£2000
Higher Education Accommodation Costs	Max £6000	x	Max £6000	x	x	x
EET Incentive	x			x		
<b>Health:</b>						
Leisure Pass	Free	Discounted		Free	Discounted	
Health Passport	x	x	x	x	x	x
<b>Other financial Support:</b>						
Birthday Allowance	x	x	x	x	x	x
Christmas Allowance	x	x	x	x	x	x
Emergency financial support	x	x	x	x	x	x

## **Financial Support**

The table above shows that Gateshead compares very favourably to our regional neighbours. While we should be rightly proud of this, they are also all currently reviewing their offers in light in the inflation and cost of living crisis.

In relation to the current offer, it is worth breaking down the details of each element and the aim of the financial assistance.

4. **Setting Up Home Allowance:** This is £2000 to furnish a tenancy, this would include decorating, furniture, soft furnishings etc. This has not changed since 2010, using the bank of England inflation calculator this amount to keep pace with inflation up to 2021 would need to rise to £2,494.89.
5. **Moving In Pack £60:** This is broken down into £20 Food £20 cleaning products £10 Gas £10 Electricity and provided to young people when they move into their first tenancy. This amount has remained the same since 2014.
6. **Winter Fuel Allowance:** This is £30 per month paid towards the cost of young people's utility bills from November to March inclusive. This increased from £20 last year.
7. **Council Tax Exemption:** Our Care experienced young people are exempt from council tax until the age of 25. This includes those young people living out of borough.
8. **Education Employment & Training incentive:** This is a maximum of £70 per month depending on the number of hours a young person engages in some form of EET. It is paid based on young people having 90% attendance per month. This amount has not changed since 2014.
9. **TV License:** We pay for the young person's first year of TV license.
10. **Birthday Allowance:** Birthday allowances are paid to young people on their birthday. They receive £20 for 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> birthdays and £50 on 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. These amounts are unchanged since 2009/10

11. **Christmas Allowance:** Young people living independently will receive a £10 gift voucher. This has remained the same since 2009/10
12. **Leisure Pass:** Young people receive free access to all Gateshead Council's gym, swimming pools and classes until the age of 25.
13. **Household Support Grant:** This was issued to the Local Authority from the Government, and we distributed £250 per care experienced young person between Jan-March 2022 as per Government guidance. There is another Household Support Grant payment expected later this year.
14. **Travel Pilot:** We are working with Nexus and CCG to provide a free Network 1 travel pass from Sept 22-Aug 23. Retail cost of Network 1 Travel Pass is £1150 each. Further information on the Travel Pilot below.

### **Practical Support**

15. Personal Adviser is allocated at 16 to co-work with the Social Worker between 16-18 and support the young person's plan. (See Allocations and Transfer document below for further details).
16. Personal Adviser will support the young person (and carers where appropriate) with preparation for independence using the Getting Ready for Adult Life Workbook and other preparation for independence Tools. They complete these tasks as part of their visits with young people when they are co allocated and the young person is aged 16-18.
17. Personal Adviser will support the Social Worker to complete the Support Accommodation & Independent Living Service (SAILS) Assessment and attend SAILS panel to identify move on accommodation. This includes the following options, 24/7 supported accommodation with Home Group, Semi supported accommodation support from 8am to 8pm, assessment unit managed by Changing Lives 24/7 support for 52 days and taster flats which would include an agreed number of hours of floating support depending on the needs of the child.

18. Personal Adviser will support their young people to understand their accommodation options, which will include visits to accommodation providers, the young person being included and an active participant in the assessment process and in their pathway plan.
19. The Care Leavers App helps keep young people informed of their rights and entitlements. It is updated with new information, events, and activities to keep young people informed. The app can be accessed offline meaning that young people do not always need data available to be able to access this information.
20. Personal Advisers refer young people to the Two-Way Tenancy Programme which is a short course which helps prepare young people for living independently, this is focussed on supporting young people around their knowledge of their responsibility in managing their tenancy.

## **Future Developments**

### **Taster Flat**

21. As part of our service improvement and developing our offer, the Leaving Care Team have worked closely with Gateshead Housing to develop a Taster Flat scheme. This will allow young people who are aged 17 the opportunity to have a taste of living independently. The young people will move into a Taster Property for a period of 6 weeks and within this time they will receive a tight support package from their Carers, Social Worker and Personal Adviser. The young people will receive a weekly living allowance which they will be supported to budget for utilities, food and travel which will replicate their financial responsibilities when living independently.
22. The taster flat experience will help prepare young people to understand the level of responsibility of living in their own property, and understand the practicalities of living alone, as well as some of the challenges such as loneliness. It is hoped this experience will help young people make a more informed decision about their future plans, help them prepare for independent living and may encourage more

young people to consider alternative options to moving into independence, such as staying put with their current foster carers.

23. When Taster Flats are not occupied, they can be used by Personal Advisers to undertake preparation for independence direct work with young people between the ages 16-18. Tasks such as shopping on a budget, batch cooking, changing a plug, changing a light bulb etc.

### **Independent Living Skills Programme**

24. We would like to look at the tools we currently use (Getting Ready for Adult Life etc) and create a Resource Library which is specific for Gateshead's care experienced young people. This will be shared with Social Workers, Carers, Children's Home staff and Personal Adviser so that all professionals are working with the young person to help prepare them for adult life and moving into independence, using the agreed tools and resources that we feel best support this work and the development of these skills.

### **Programme of activities**

25. We have applied for external funding to plan a programme of activities for young people to get involved in. This will include sporting activities such as football and walks, as well as practical activities such as cookery and photography groups. We are also working alongside Gateshead Workforce Development colleagues to deliver some formal qualifications such as Health and Safety, Food Hygiene Courses and others to contribute towards their skills and qualifications and enhance their training and employability options

### **Travel Pilot**

26. The Leaving Care Team worked closely with partners from the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to secure funding of £45k to support travel for care

experienced young people. This was because of work completed with Newcastle and Gateshead care experienced teams and the CCG around young people's access to health services.

27. Gateshead currently has 104 young people open to the Leaving Care Team. Approximately 65 of these young people live independently in the community in their own tenancy. Many of these young people do not have family, friends or support networks outside of professionals. Travelling via public transport is often a luxury they cannot afford to prioritise given the current cost of living and the financial resources available to them especially if they are not in EET. The Travel Pilot will support young people living independently by offering these young people free travel within the region for a period of 12 months.

28. Prior to receiving the free travel pass, the young people will be required to complete a questionnaire to gather their views on their current circumstances / barriers and the impact of not being able to afford to meet travel costs. The young person's PA would continue to maintain regular contact with the young people over the free travel period. At the end of the 12 months, they would complete an evaluation to measure the difference having access to free access to travel has made to their life, mental health and emotional wellbeing.

29. The feedback and evaluation will be used to support requests for partner organisations offering free or discounted travel as part of their "Corporate Parent" responsibility to care experienced young people and could contribute to regional work undertaken in the future.

### **Regional Leaving Care Forum**

30. Regular meetings with the Regional Leaving Care Forum to share examples of good practice, ensure Gateshead are keeping up with our counterparts across the region and contributing to matters which impact on care experienced young people

across our region to reduce the 'postcode lottery' of care leavers being offered different support depending on where they are living.

31. There is a formal Training programme for Personal Advisers via the Regional Leaving Care Forum, to ensure our Personal Advisers continue to provide a high standard of support to our care experienced young people.

### **Care Leaver Covenant**

32. The service continues to work with the Care Leaver Covenant to share good practice, create new opportunities and access wider opportunities via a range of sectors for our care experienced young people. What support can the wider council provide in supporting the service to engage with business to support our work.

### **Drop in Service**

33. The service is looking at creating a drop in provision for our young people to attend as and when support is required on an evening, to make support accessible for all young people. This could include advice around benefits, employment, education, training as well as practical and emotional support.

### **Utilities**

34. We are in the process of gathering data from young people to find out what they are paying for their utility costs. The purpose of this is to explore if there is one provider cheaper than another, what methods of payment are open to our young people and how does this impact what they pay for the utilities.
35. Once we have this information, we could feed this into the Regional Leaving Care Forum and Care Leaver Covenant and see if we can approach government and utility providers to offer some form of discount to care experienced young people.

### **Setting Up Home Allowance (SUHA)**



36. The current budget for SUHA is £2000 and has remained the same since 2010. It is now very challenging to furnish and prepare a property for £2000. Gateshead Housing tenancies have no carpet/flooring which instantly takes up 25% of the budget. Sunderland have recently increased their SUHA to £3000 and if a young person is moving into a Local Authority tenancy, they add the cost of carpets to this amount. The service would like to request a SUHA to make it £2,500 which would be inline with the inflation rises since 2010. The service will also be working with housing colleagues to explore flooring/carpeting and furniture packs available via the local authority and seeing what support is available from them in meeting these costs.

### **Corporate parenting support across the council**

37. Corporate parenting needs to be a whole council approach to supporting our young people. Historically there has been sign up from different areas but little has materialised from some areas. The service would welcome Corporate Parenting Boards suggestions about what can we do to change this to create positive change for our young people in how they are supported in their journey towards independence.

### **Proposal**

38. It is proposed that corporate parenting board consider the future planning around service developments and provide any comments or suggestions around this program of work, with a particular focus on how we can gain buy in across council departments that can support care experienced young people's journey into independence

39. The regional care leavers board across the NE12 authorities are also considering the standardisation of local authorities offers to care leavers. It is proposed that the outcomes and recommendations of this work is shared with Corporate Parenting Board.

## **Recommendations**

40. The Corporate Parenting Board are asked to note the comments of this report and offer any comments or recommendations as they see fit.

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