

Consultation on the removal of eligible care leavers liability for payment of council tax

Consultation Response Form

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Responses to consultations may be made public. To keep your response anonymous (including email addresses) tick the box.

Question 1

Do you agree with the policy intent to remove care leavers from joint and several liability for council tax? Please give your reasons.

YES

Young people leaving care are a mixed group in terms of their life experiences, the support and interventions they will have received and their inherent abilities and aptitudes in responding to their circumstances. They will bring a varying range of readiness to the process of leaving care and moving into independent living. We know that the key issues that young people leaving care face include:

- Mental health and emotional wellbeing
- Successful engagement with education, employment and training.
- Continuity in relationships
- Transition to independence

Care leavers often also face significant financial challenges. Many are reliant on state benefits, such as universal credit, and as they receive little support in setting up their own home, many can find themselves in debt from the outset, needing to purchase furniture, carpets etc with very limited financial support. Legislating to protect care leavers from council tax is one way that these financial challenges can be mitigated.

Whilst the average young person lives at home until the age of 23, care leavers are expected to live independently from the age of 18 or earlier.¹ This creates a clear need to designate tailored support for care leavers.

Furthermore, where a care leaver is in a joint tenancy with another person who is eligible for council tax, removing care leavers from joint and several liability for council tax can help remove some opportunities for financial abuse through accruing debt in this way.

The number of challenges facing young people leaving care – whatever their circumstances – means we should actively look for every opportunity to support their transition into living independently and ensure that they are protected from financial shocks, such as would be created by unexpectedly becoming liable for council tax that was unpaid by another party.

Question 2

We have proposed changes be made to the relevant legislation to remove care leavers from joint or several liability for council tax. Do you agree with this approach or can you suggest an alternative?

YES

Any means through which care leavers can be guaranteed some protection from paying financial hardship or burden is a welcome one. Young people leaving care already face a huge amount of financial pressure and uncertainty. Legislating to provide this protection will ensure that there is no doubt that care leavers should be exempt from council tax – whether through joint or several liability – and provide the certainty that care leavers need to manage their finances and begin building their lives independently.

Barnardo's Cymru would urge Welsh Government to be constantly looking for opportunities to remove barriers faced by care leavers, particularly financial barriers which could be the difference between a care leaver successfully managing their finances and not, with all of the consequences that this could include.

We would urge Welsh Government to take a whole-person approach to supporting care leavers to manage their finances and the early years of living independently. This could include free access to bus and train travel to help care leavers keep up with their networks without a financial barrier affecting this, and therefore reducing issues such as isolation and poor mental health, and ultimately making housing placements for care

¹ *No Place Like Home: a look at young people's experiences of leaving the care system*
<https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-05/No-Place-Like-Home-Report-IKEA.pdf>

leavers more successful. Free access to public transport would also help care leavers with accessing services, appointments and employment opportunities, particularly for those living in more rural areas. We would recommend that this be offered up until the age of 25, in line with the commitment to personal advisors for every care leaver up to this age.

Question 3

We would like to know your views on the effects that these proposals would have on the Welsh language, specifically on opportunities for people to use Welsh and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English.

What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?

Question 4

Please also explain how you believe the proposed policy approach could be formulated or changed so as to have positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language, and no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

Question 5

We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related points which we have not addressed, please use this space to record them: