

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

CARE LEAVING SERVICE FINANCIAL POLICY

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To inform and seek Cabinet approval of the updated Care Leavers Financial Policy, which outlines the package of financial support available to our young people leaving care.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 Our ambition is for children to live within their families, attend their school and be a part of their community. As corporate parenting is deeply rooted in the culture of the Council and its partner organisations to care about them in this way. We are collectively ambitious for children in care and care leavers and we expect their outcomes to be every bit as good as their peers – and better.
- 2.2 The legislation surrounding who is a Care Leaver can be quite complex however generally, to receive support as a care leaver, a young person must have been in care for at least 13 weeks between the ages of 14 and 18, but with one of these days occurring after the young person's 16th Birthday. Please see supporting documents for further information regarding eligibility.
- 2.3 The Multi-Agency Children in Care and Care Leavers Plan 2020-2022 sets out our key priorities, promise and commitment to children in care and care leavers. It builds on our success and sets out an ambitious agenda for further improvement, and to support young people to live successful lives in our community.
- 2.4 The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations *Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers* sets out the requirement for Local Authorities to have a 'clear written and transparent financial policy' that 'sets out what entitlements young people have'. The guidance also states that the financial policy should be reviewed every year by the local authority and set out how the local authority as a 'good corporate parent' will assist the young person with financial support to achieve economic well-being and make a positive and successful transition to adulthood

- 2.5 North Lincolnshire's financial policy to care leavers is therefore a key component in successfully delivering the outcomes identified within the Multi-Agency Children in Care and Care Leavers Plan 2020-2022.
- 2.6 The policy continues to contain financial support available to young people in specific areas, to raise ambitions and promote outcomes. This includes; financial support to young people to access further and higher education to promote education and career opportunities; support for young parents to ensure they can be best possible parents to their children and reduce the risk of children of care leavers becoming looked after; financial support to support young people's social development, in order to reduce social isolation and promote positive emotional wellbeing.
- 2.7 The revised policy contains additional financial support with an increase in the living allowance for our young people to help towards their living costs. The plan will be to review this element of the financial policy within 6 months.
- 2.8 In addition, we have also increased the financial support to ensure that care leavers aged 18+ are able to keep in touch including the provision of Wifi/Mifi and, in exceptional circumstances, through the provision of a mobile phone. In order to support effective transition to adulthood, access to this support will be needs assessed through identification within the young person's Pathway Plan. In the case of young people accessing further or higher education or training, the provision of Mifi/Wifi/digital connectivity will always be provided to support ongoing education and learning.
- 2.9 Furthermore, the revised financial policy includes an increase in financial support towards driving lessons recognising the cost of lessons. It is considered important to support our young people in the steps to obtaining a driving licence which can open up further opportunities for employment.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 Option 1

Continue with the current policy, and make no revisions to the financial support available to our young people.

3.2 Option 2

Implement the revised financial policy, which provides greater levels of financial support to young people as a result of the current rise in energy costs, extends the offer of Wifi/Mifi to our young people beyond the age of 16 and 17 years and increased financial support towards driving lessons.

4. **ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS**

4.1 **Option 1**

Option 1 would retain the current working practices in line with the current policy.

4.2 **Option 2**

Option 2 would support our young people with the cost of living as a result of the current rise in energy costs. Our young people have voiced challenges with managing on their budgets with the rise in the fuel costs and there is a need to recognise this. In addition the financial policy will ensure that care leavers aged 18+ are able to keep in touch including the provision of Wifi/Mifi.

4.3 Furthermore, the revised financial policy includes an increase in financial support towards driving lessons recognising the cost of lessons. It is considered important to support our young people in the steps to obtaining a driving licence which can open up further opportunities for employment.

4.4 Option 2 would enable us to provide financial support in line with our Corporate Parenting promise to our Care Leavers.

4.5 **Option 2 is the preferred option.**

5. **FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (e.g. LEGAL, HR, PROPERTY, IT, COMMUNICATIONS etc.)**

5.1 Financial – It is estimated that the costs of delivering the reviewed financial policy are approximately £225k per annum. The estimated expenditure can be met within the current budgets, ensuring that there is no additional financial implications to the Council.

6. **OTHER RELEVANT IMPLICATIONS (e.g. CRIME AND DISORDER, EQUALITIES, COUNCIL PLAN, ENVIRONMENTAL, RISK etc.)**

6.1 In ensuring that the needs of our care leavers continue to be promoted, and their ambitions and outcomes are supported, it is envisaged that the revised policy will have a positive impact in:

- Prosperous - supporting young people's confidence and aspirations, success and engagement with education, employment and training. This will also support our young people to gain and sustain employment opportunities, ensuring they are prosperous within our community.

- Safe and Well – ensuring that our young people have the finances to meet their needs. We will also ensure that young people facing social isolation and digital poverty are supported, to promote good emotional health and wellbeing.
- Connected – young people are engaged in education and training opportunities alongside their peers, leading to young people being an active part of their communities through voluntary and paid employment. Young people will also be specifically supported to reduce social isolation and improve emotional wellbeing as a result.

7. OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)

7.1 Not required.

8. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED

8.1 The voice of our young people who have left care has been central to the development of the services provided and of the offer from the Care Leaving Service. Feedback and ideas continue to be sought on a regular, informal basis and have helped to shape the revised financial policy.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 That Cabinet endorses the implementation of the revised Financial Policy, in order to provide greater tools and resources to support our young people in line with and exceeds national best practices.

DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

- Revised Financial Policy March 2022

North Lincolnshire Council

Integrated Service for Care Leavers Financial Policy and Procedure

Status	DATE	By Whom
Approved	March 2022	Ann-Marie Brierley
Last Updated	September 2021	
Review Date	October 2022	

Policy

To ensure that all young people in receipt of services under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations, Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers, receive their entitlement to financial support whether it be through service or external funding, to ensure that young people's income is maximised and are no worse off than they would be on state benefits.

All financial arrangements must be recorded in the young person's Pathway Plan and reviewed accordingly.

Scope

This policy applies to all young people who have left the care of North Lincolnshire Council who have a legal status of eligible and live in the community, relevant, former relevant or qualifying, as defined by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. This policy does not replace young people's entitlement to welfare benefits, where financial support can be met through young people's entitlement to appropriate benefits, grants and bursaries the young person must be supported to access these.

All financial support will be assessed and identified within the Pathway Plan and agreed by the responsible Practice Supervisor.

Scheme of Allowances

Personal Allowances

The council will provide a personal allowance for all young people aged 16 and 17, and young people who do not have access to public funds, who are supported to live in the community. The amount provided is based on benefit levels as at April each year and will not be less than that amount. The amount will be reviewed on an annual basis in line with benefit levels. (Exceptions to this will be lone parents and young people who have a disability, who are both entitled to claim the appropriate state benefits).

North Lincolnshire Council may provide additional incentive allowances for young people receiving a service aged 16 – 21 to support and encourage their employability/training activities.

A personal allowance will not be paid to young people who earn in excess of the agreed threshold.

Accommodation costs

North Lincolnshire Council will meet the rental costs for 16 – 17 year old Care Leavers when placed in supported housing within the community. The allowances are based on the young persons assessed need and market rental prices per week, these will be reviewed by April each year. Young people aged 16-17, and those young people who do not have access to public funds (i.e. UASC), who are living in semi-independent accommodation provided by NLC will

make a financial contribution to the costs of utilities within their accommodation. This will be deducted from the living allowance prior to this being provided to the young person.

Young people aged 18 – 25 who do not have an income from employment will have their housing costs met by Housing Benefit where appropriate. Such young people will be responsible for the utility costs (Gas, Electric and Water) for the accommodation. In exceptional cases where young people are engaging in FE at age 19/20 and Housing Benefit does not apply, the council will determine, on the basis of individual need, what level of financial support may be offered.

Young people aged 21 – 25 who are engaging in Higher Education courses should have their individual needs assessed through the Pathway Plan Review process, and financial support may be offered to ensure a young person is supported to complete their HE course. Access to financial support will be discretionary and based upon individual circumstances and will be approved by the responsible Practice Supervisor.

Council Tax

The Council are committed to enabling Care Leavers to successfully progress to living within their own accommodation and there is ongoing political support to achieve this. To help Care Leavers manage their finances whilst they make this transition, they are exempt from Council Tax up to their 22nd birthday. Personal Advisors must work alongside young people to make representations with the Council Tax Department to ensure that exemptions are awarded accordingly.

Setting up home allowance

North Lincolnshire Council will provide setting up costs to support young people who are moving from care or supported accommodation into their own independent accommodation. The amount will be based on individual need and size of accommodation. Young people may choose to save some of their setting up home allowance for future accommodation options.

Setting up financial support may be provided for the young person until their 21st birthday, this will be based on individual need and previous setting up expenditure. Clause 3 of the *Children and Social Work Act 2017* and the *Extending Personal Adviser support to all care leavers to age 25 Statutory Guidance 2018* extended the requirement to provide Personal Advisors and support to Care leavers up to the age of 25.

In line with this, where a care leaver has requested support after their 21st birthday, in exceptional circumstances payments of this allowance may be made up to the age of 25. This should be based on their assessed needs, authorised by a Practice Supervisor and recorded within their Pathway Plan. Examples of when these circumstances could apply may be (but not limited to):

- A Care Leaver who has been in custody before being able to access their grant
- A Care Leaver accessing Higher Education and therefore not ready to move into independent accommodation.
- Care Leavers who chose to remain in a Staying Put arrangement
- Care Leavers who are experiencing financial and/or accommodation difficulties that require immediate support to establish them within accommodation

North Lincolnshire Council may provide further assistance to support young people where there is genuine need in exceptional circumstances, in these circumstances this will be determined by the responsible Service Manager.

Young People in Higher Education (HE), Further Education (FE), Training or Employment

Young people entering into FE are entitled to a bursary from the college of £1,200. Young people will be supported to access this provision via the college, the bursary is intended to support young people financially with expenses associated with attending FE courses, such as travel, books, lunches. (This is paid on a weekly basis)

The council may provide financial support to young people who are in full time FE or those in HE to assist them in maintaining their attendance. The Council will not make payments as an alternative to a FE bursary, any payments made will be based on individual need and circumstances and may include:

- Travel costs (term time only)
- Stationery
- Laptop and printer if required
- Incentive for attendance when in FE or training
- Travel costs when in employment for the first month
- Job interview
- Limited Rent top up when in FE or an apprenticeship and there is a shortfall in housing benefit
- Connectivity – including equipment and Wi-Fi access

Rent top ups may be in the form of a direct payment to the landlord, rather than an issue of cash to the young person.

No young person who enters into employment should be worse off financially. A financial assessment will be carried out and recorded in the pathway plan provided for all young people entering into employment. Employers must pay at least the relevant minimum wage, where this is not the case young people will be supported to challenge the employer.

The council recognises the importance of promoting consistent attendance at FE provisions, and the impact that this can have on a young person's future. To support this, a termly incentive payment will be made to any young person who achieves 95% attendance or higher.

Bursaries for Higher Education

Many Universities provide bursaries and free accommodation for young people who have left the care of the local authority. The council will support young people to access bursaries where available and ensure that a full financial assessment is carried out and documented within the pathway plan. Any bursary gained will form a part of the agreed allowance if the young person chooses not to apply for bursaries, the council will not make payments to replace any bursary that may have been available.

The council will provide a bursary of £2000 which is over and above any other bursary gained. The £2000 can be spread over the length of the Higher Education course or may be paid in a

lump sum, the £2000 will only be paid once. The payment details will be agreed with the young person and detailed within the pathway plan.

Young Parents

All young parents will receive a full welfare rights assessment and information on the maternity benefits available to them. All young people will receive direct support from their Personal Advisor to make applications for grants and benefits that they may be entitled to.

North Lincolnshire Council will also provide a grant payment to any care leaver aged under 21 who is expecting a child, over and above any other grants available to the young person, to support them with provisions for the arrival of their child. Payments of this grant will normally be paid through the purchase of provisions, but in exceptional circumstances may be made in cash, following approval by the responsible service manager.

North Lincolnshire Council may also provide as a discretionary payment, where this has been needs assessed via their Pathway Plan, an additional annual payment to any care leaver who is a parent under 21 years of age – up to 25 in exceptional circumstances - to support them with the maintenance of their child. Payment of this grant will normally be through the purchase of provisions, but in exceptional circumstances may be made in cash, following approval by the responsible service manager.

Christmas and Birthdays

North Lincolnshire Council will provide care leavers with a gift at Christmas or other celebrated religious festival annually, and at each birthday up to the age of 21 years. In exceptional circumstances, in line with their assessed needs, this can continue up to 25.

Clothing

The council will ensure all young people who leave care have adequate suitable clothing, this should be arranged prior to the young person leaving care. Particular focus will be given on ensuring young people have adequate winter clothing. An annual clothing allowance will be provided to care leavers each year to ensure they have access to suitable clothing up to the amount. This may be provided in cash, or via supported purchasing, however, this will be clearly outlined in the young person's pathway plan and in line with their individual needs.

This allowance will be split into two parts

- A guaranteed winter clothing allowance to ensure that a young person has suitable clothing for the winter periods.
- An additional allowance that will be needs assessed through the Pathway Plan review process, to enable care leavers to purchase other seasonal clothing.

North Lincolnshire Council may make payments for additional clothing on an individual basis in exceptional circumstances.

Connectivity

The council recognises the importance of ensuring our young people remain connected to their support networks, their peer groups and with ourselves. To support this, we will ensure all young people aged 16 and 17 years who leave move to supported accommodation have suitable

means of keeping in touch, including the purchase of a pay-as-you-go mobile phone up to the value detailed in the Schedule. It will also include ensuring all young people have connectivity through access to Wifi/Mifi and suitably enabled equipment. This should be arranged prior to the young person leaving care.

We will also continue to ensure that care leavers aged 18+ are able to keep in touch including the provision of Wifi/Mifi and, in exceptional circumstances, through the provision of a mobile phone. In order to support effective transition to adulthood, access to this support will be needs assessed through identification within the young person's Pathway Plan, and therefore agreed by the responsible practice supervisors. In the case of young people accessing further or higher education or training, the provision of Mifi/Wifi/digital connectivity will always be provided to support ongoing education and learning.

The council may also support young people to acquire additional mobile phones in exceptional circumstances, such as if a mobile phone is stolen, damaged or lost, and the provision of a mobile phone and/or connectivity enabled equipment is essential in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of the young person.

Accessing Leisure facilities

The council's Leisure Services will, where appropriate, make available free leisure access to young people. Other associated costs for gym, football leagues etc will be based on individual need and agreed via the Pathway Plan.

Social activities

The council recognises the impact that attendance at social activities is a vital component in ensuring that young people do not experience social isolation, and that their emotional wellbeing and mental health is actively promoted.

To support our young people, an annual allowance for social activities will be provided to young people to ensure they have the opportunity to engage in activities and events, in line with their peers. This could be used, for example, to attend a football match, a concert, a meal or any other activities with peers.

Passports

All young people who leave care should have a passport, this should be arranged prior to the young person leaving care at the age of 18 by their carer in conjunction with the young person's Social Worker. In the case of unaccompanied or refugee children, suitable travel documents will be sourced where required, if a passport cannot be obtained.

Exceptional payments

North Lincolnshire Council may provide exceptional payments in the event of circumstances detrimental to the young person's welfare, these may include:

- Theft or Fire
- Pregnancy (clothing)*
- Severe cold weather payments

- Support with utilities/essential items in exceptional circumstances.

*Maternity grant must be applied for at the relevant time and access to a full welfare rights assessment provided.

Young people aged 18 and over should apply to the Crisis Fund in the event of:

- Theft of cash carried on the person or burglary of dwelling
- Flooding of dwelling
- Fire of dwelling

Incentives

Incentives may be provided to encourage and support young people to attend employability and consultation activities; these may include;

- Mobile top up
- High street vouchers
- Cash payments where appropriate and in exceptional circumstances
- Activities

Young people detained within the Youth Justice system or the Adult Criminal system

Any young person who is detained will be expected to participate in work within the custody provision. A postal order payment will be provided to young people in detained, to support them to purchase essential items, and for them to be able to contact family/support networks whilst in custody.

Discretionary payments

Some young people may on occasion require financial support that is not itemised within this policy, on these occasions a discretionary payment may be made, any payment will be based on assessed need and agreed with the young person Pathway Plan.

SCHEDULE OF PAYMENTS

Accommodation

Independent living	Up to £120 per week
Supported Lodgings	Up to £198 per week
Family home for Young Parents	Up to £130 per week
Utility financial contribution by YP (if required as above)	£15 per week, deducted from weekly living allowance

Setting up home Allowance

Single occupancy (1 bed flat)	Up to £2000*
Young parents accommodation	Up to £2500*

*Based on agreed minimum standards for furnishing and equipment

Personal Allowance

Personal Allowance Threshold	£87.90
Personal allowance	£57.90

Young People in Further Education

Laptop & Printer	Up to £350 based on individual needs
Stationary for the start of an educational course	Up to £20 each academic year
Travel/bus pass (where not eligible for a pass via the educational provision)	Up to £20 per week, based upon positive attendance.
Clothing / equipment (eg College Bag, safety equipment etc)	As required up to £100 per year
Incentive Payment for attendance (95% or higher)	Up to £100 per term
Excursion/Trip (if support not available via the educational provision)	Up to £100 per academic year
Graduation/completion celebration for worker & young person	Up to £50

Young People in Higher Education

Vacation periods	Reasonable accommodation costs
Laptop & Printer	Up to £450 based on individual needs
Books stationary etc	Up to £200 based on individual needs
Travel	Rail or bus fare paid for return journeys home for contact with family, based on assessed need
LA Bursary – one off payment throughout university studies.	£2000 - arrangements for payment must be detailed in the pathway plan
Graduation costs	Hire of gown and photographs based on individual needs
Graduation/completion celebration for worker & young person	Up to £100
Other expenses starter payment Social & Leisure activities	Up to £100 Based upon individual needs

Young Parents

Maternity Grant for expectant parents	Up to £300
Annual support/maintenance Grant for child	Up to £150 per year

Clothing Allowance

Winter Clothing payment	Up to £100 per year
Seasonal clothing payment (needs assessed)	Up to £200 per year

Social/Leisure Activities

Support to access social opportunities	Up to £50 per year
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Christmas and Birthday Gifts

Recognised Religious Festival (Christmas, Eid etc)	Gift up to £50
Birthday	Gift up to £50
18 th Birthday	Gift up to £75
21st Birthday	Gift up to £75

Driving lessons

10 driving lessons with a recognised instructor	Up to £300
Contribution to the cost of up to 2 theory tests	Up to £80
Contribution to the cost of up to 2 Practical tests	Up to £140

Incentives

Mobile Phone	Up to £100
Attendance at employability activities (including work experience, voluntary work, training courses etc)	Up to £20 per day of attendance

Young people in custody

Postal Order	Up to £20 per month
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Administration of payments to young people within this financial policy

All payments to be made under this Policy will be made via the designated Softbox system. This ensures that a clear and accurate record of all payments is kept.

In all cases, payments will be made via electronic means. This includes BACS transfers to young people's bank accounts or prepaid debit cards (if they don't have access to a bank account). In exceptional circumstances, and when agreed by the responsible Practice Supervisor, payments can be made in cash.

All payments to be made should be recorded within the *Care Leaver Payment Request* CareFirst form. This form should be reassigned to the responsible Practice Supervisor who will then authorise the request. No payments will be made without this form being authorised.

Review of Scheme of Allowances

The Scheme of Allowances will be reviewed each year as a minimum.

ADDENDUM - MARCH 2022

Care Leavers are provided with financial assistance via an allowance. Within the Care Leavers Service, we have experienced an increase in the amount of young people requesting additional finance supporting in 2021/22. As a result, the Care Leaving Service will provide an energy supplement to every young person open with an active Pathway Plan, to support them financially. The value of this supplement will be **£20 per month**. This support will be made available for the next 12 months from April 2022, subject to a 6 month review in October 2022.

Care Leavers

The eligibility for care leaving services is defined within the Children Act 1989, and is outlined below.

The Children Act 1989 also outlines North Lincolnshire’s statutory obligations to each young person who falls within each category below

Eligible children

Defined in paragraph 19B of Schedule 2 to the 1989 Act, and regulation 40 of the Care Planning Regulations as a child who is:

- (a) looked after,
- (b) aged 16 or 17, and
- (c) has been looked after by a local authority for a period of 13 weeks, or periods amounting in total to 13 weeks, which began after he reached 14 and ended after he reached 16.

Relevant children

Defined in section 23A(2) of the 1989 Act as a child who is:

- (a) not looked after,
- (b) aged 16 or 17, and
- (c) was, before he last ceased to be looked after, an eligible child.

Regulation 3 of the Care Leavers

Regulations prescribes a further category of relevant child who is:

- (a) not looked after,
- (b) aged 16 or 17, and
- (c) at the time he attained the age of 16 was detained (i.e. detained in a remand centre, a young offenders institution or a secure training centre, or any other centre pursuant to a Court order), or in a hospital, and immediately before he was detained or in hospital he had been looked after by a local authority for a period or periods amounting in all to at least 13 weeks which began after he reached the age of 14.

Regulation 3 of the Care Leavers

Regulations also provides that a child who has lived for a continuous period of six months or more with:

- (a) his parent,
- (b) someone who is not his parent but who has parental responsibility for him or,
- (c) where he is in care and there was a residence order in force immediately before the care order was made, a person in whose favour the residence order was made then that child is not a relevant child despite falling within section 23A(2). Where those living arrangements break down and the child ceases to live with the person concerned, the child is to be treated as a relevant child.

Former relevant children

Defined in section 23C(1) of the 1989 Act as a young person who is:

- (a) aged 18 or above, and either (b) has been a relevant child and would be one if he were under 18, or (c) immediately before he ceased to be looked after at age 18, was an eligible child.

Former relevant children pursuing further education or training

Defined in section 23CA(1) as a former relevant child who is:

- (b) aged under 25,
- (c) in relation to whom the duties in 23C(2)(3) and (4) no longer apply, and he has informed the local authority that he wants to pursue or is pursuing a programme of education or training.

Persons qualifying for advice and assistance

Defined in section 24 of the 1989 Act as a person who is:

- (a) aged at least 16 but is under 21,
- (b) with respect to whom a special guardianship order is in force (or was in force when they reached 18) and was looked after immediately before the making of that order, or
- (c) at any time after reaching the age of 16 but while he was still a child was, but is no longer, looked after, accommodated or fostered.