

SUPPORTING CARE LEAVERS POLICY

2021-2024

BASILDON BOROUGH COUNCIL

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Author: Tom Conniffe

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1. Introduction

Basildon Borough Council is clear that improving the lives of residents and creating opportunity and prosperity for local people and businesses sits at the heart of all that it does. This commitment is embedded within this policy, which sets out more explicitly Basildon Council's approach to supporting local care leavers.

Leaving Care refers to young people aged between 16 and 18 who have previously been in the care of the local authority, but are no longer legally "looked after" by it. In this case, the local authority is Essex County Council (ECC). Young adults do not have to leave care when they are 16 but can remain in care until they are 18. If the young adult is in foster care, they can request a 'Staying Put Arrangement' to remain in their foster home after they turn 18.

2. Executive Summary

Essex County Council is the corporate parent of those young people leaving local authority care. Basildon Borough Council wants to enhance the Essex offer for those leaving care in Basildon borough. This policy sets out why Basildon Borough Council will support local care leavers in their transition from leaving care into independent living.

The policy will be underpinned by a strategy and action plan to detail the interventions that will together deliver the Supporting Care Leavers policy objectives of:

- Council Tax exemption
- Accommodation
- Education, employment and training
- Health and wellbeing

As a further sign of its commitment to supporting care leavers the Council will sign up to the national Care Leaver Covenant.

3. Policy Statement

Young people leaving care constitutes one of the most vulnerable groups in our society. The Council is committed to supporting care leavers in the Borough and will seek to enhance and provide opportunities for them as they make the transition to adulthood and independent living.

Actions to support this policy will be delivered in collaboration with our partners EveryOne Active and the Basildon, Billericay, Wickford Community and Voluntary Service, who have both already agreed to lend their support. Selected local Registered Social Landlords also assist in supporting care leavers by providing accommodation based support services, which provide the skills young people require to live independently. As the policy becomes embedded other partners are expected to collaborate in this delivery, such as the new Youth Zone and education providers. The

Council will also seek to build alliances through actions delivered as a result of its Social Value Policy.

4. Definitions

For the purpose of this policy, a 'care leaver' is defined as:

A person aged up to 21, who either:

- (a) has been looked after by Essex County Council (Essex) for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14; and who was looked after by the local authority at school-leaving age or after that date; or
- (b) is entitled to leaving care support from Essex.

The Children Act 1989 defines the categories of children entitled to leaving care support as:

- 'Eligible children' are those young people aged 16-17 who are still in care and have been 'looked after' for a total of 13 weeks from the age of 14 and including their 16th birthday;
- 'Relevant children' are those young people aged 16 and 17 who have already left care, and who were 'looked after' for at least 13 weeks from the age of 14 and have been 'looked after' at some time while they were 16 or 17;
- 'Former relevant children' are those young people aged 18, 19 or 20 who have been eligible and/or relevant.

5. Background

In January 2020, Essex County Councillor McKinlay gave a presentation on Essex County Council's care leaver programme to the Basildon Council External Affairs, Partnerships and Liaisons committee. She advised that the County Council were focusing on the key areas of housing, work experience opportunities and Council Tax exemption for Care Leavers up to the age of 21, and wanted to work with partners across the County to deliver this.

In response, on 14 April 2020, Basildon Borough Council's Staffing Matters and Review Sub Committee (minute 258) approved the Essex Care Leavers and Council Tax Policy. The policy allows Basildon Borough Council to reduce the council tax liability so that the liability of the household is the same as it would have been had the care leaver been a 'disregarded person'. A disregarded person is:

- aged 17 or under
- a prisoner or someone in detention awaiting deportation or under mental health legislation
- 'severely mentally impaired'
- a full-time student on a qualifying course of education (including correspondence or on-line courses), a student nurse or a Foreign Language

Assistant on the official British Council programme (if the property is occupied only by students then it is exempt from council tax altogether)

- a spouse, civil partner or dependant of a student who is a non-British Citizen and who, under immigration rules, is not allowed either to work in the UK or claim benefit
- a young person on a government training scheme or following some kinds of apprenticeship
- a long-term hospital patient or care home resident
- living in a hostel which provides care or treatment because of old age, physical or mental disability, past or present alcohol or drug dependence or past or present mental illness
- living in a bail or probation hostel
- a live-in care worker
- staying in a hostel or night shelter, for example, in a Salvation Army or Church Army hostel
- a school or college leaver aged under 20 who has left school or college after 30 April
- aged 18 and someone is entitled to Child Benefit on their behalf
- a member of a religious community
- a member of a visiting armed force - their dependents are also disregarded

Subsequently, the council's Covid-19 Policy Response Group determined that Basildon Borough Council would consider other ways to support local care leavers, such as signing the Care Leavers Covenant, and, further, develop a local policy to frame this support around housing, health and wellbeing, and employment and training opportunities.

6. National context

Compared to the general population care leavers are:¹

- less likely to be in education, employment or training - over a third of 19 year old care leavers are not in education, employment or training, although, with support, many achieve success in education and training in later life.
- more likely to be attempting to live independently - some are unable to remain in their placements beyond age 18. They are therefore likely to experience compressed and accelerated transitions to attempt independence.
- more likely to have a criminal conviction, and may have experienced unnecessary criminalisation. Care leavers are estimated to represent between 24% and 27% of the adult prison population. This is despite less than 1% of under-18s entering local authority care each year.
- three times more likely to be parents at a young age.
- four times more likely to develop a mental health disorder.

¹ Statistics about the care leaver cohort taken from the Department for Education's *Statistical First Release for children looked-after in England*

These statistics have been acknowledged in the Service Impact Assessment (SIA), which identifies the positive impacts of adopting the policy on these protected groups:

- Pregnancy and maternity
- Socio-economic
- Ex-offenders
- Age
- Health

The SIA also recognises the impact of this policy on 'race and culture' due to the additional barrier that affects children leaving care whose first language is not English, such as looked after children who are unaccompanied and seeking asylum. According to ECC, in November 2020 there were 57 unaccompanied asylum seeking children in care or leaving care in Basildon. Those leaving care are particularly isolated once they leave a family or group home setting.

7. Local context

Essex County Council (ECC) is the main corporate parent and support provider for Essex care leavers during their transition from leaving care to independent living. This support covers:

- Accommodation
- Education, employment and training
- Finances
- Health
- Participation in society

However, wider society has a moral obligation and collective responsibility to support vulnerable people, such as care leavers. To support ECC's work, therefore, Basildon Borough Council will provide support to care leavers in the following areas:

- Council Tax exemption
- Accommodation
- Education, employment and training
- Health and wellbeing

In September 2020, a Freedom of Information request to ECC was made as follows;

*The number of children in care who could potentially be housed by Basildon Borough Council once they leave care. This could be those in care in Basildon or those who have been placed in care out of Basildon but have a local connection to Basildon. Broken down into the following age brackets:
Number of those currently aged 15, those currently aged 16, those currently aged 17, those currently aged 18 to 21*

The response from the Essex Children and Families service was as follows;

- 1 young person aged 15 years
- 18 young people aged 16 years
- 32 young people aged 17 years
- 72 young people aged 18-21 years

Although these figures are a snapshot, they allow for some measuring of capacity and resources required to undertake interventions.

8. Areas of support for care leavers in Basildon

i) Council Tax Exemption

It is the desire of councils in Essex to assist young people leaving the care of a local authority with their Council Tax liability until they are age 21. On 14 April 2020, Basildon Borough Council's Staffing Matters and Review Sub Committee approved the Essex Care Leavers and Council Tax Policy. The policy enables this council to grant discretionary Council Tax relief to Essex care leavers living in the borough. This policy utilised the discretionary power available to billing authorities arising from S13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 to reduce or further reduce the amount of council tax a person is liable to pay, as it sees fit.

The policy states:

For the purpose of calculating the amount of discretionary council tax reduction to apply, care leavers and those in their household are required to take steps to minimise their liability for council tax by claiming discounts, exemptions and council tax reduction where eligible.

After all discounts, exemptions and council tax reduction have been claimed the Council will reduce the council tax liability so that the liability of the household is the same as it would have been had the care leaver been a 'disregarded person' (such as students) as detailed in s11 and Schedule 1 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

For example:

- A care leaver joining an existing household with a single person discount in place will be given sufficient discretionary relief under the Care Leavers Exemption to ensure that the council tax liability does not increase as a result of their presence.
- A household where only care leavers are liable to pay council tax will be given sufficient discretionary relief to extinguish the council tax liability completely.
- A care leaver in a property, which would otherwise be exempt from council tax, will be given sufficient discretionary relief under the Care Leavers Exemption to ensure that no council tax becomes payable.
- Where a care leaver joining an existing household makes no difference to the council tax liability of that household, the Care Leavers Exemption will not apply.

ii) Accommodation

As a Local Housing Authority, Basildon Borough Council has a duty to give help and advice to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Care Leavers are automatically considered as a 'priority need' under the Homeless Reduction Act 2017. As with all homeless applications the council must also determine whether someone is homeless or threatened with homelessness, eligible for assistance, whether the applicant is intentionally homeless or not and determine whether there is a local connection when making a decision on a homeless application. The Homelessness Code of Guidance was revised in 2018 to reflect the changes introduced in the Act. The Code outlines the importance of joint working when planning housing options for care leavers.

In October 2020 the Government introduced a good practice advice document entitled "Joint housing protocols for care leavers". The document is intended to support the development of joint protocols that can help local authorities to meet the accommodation needs of care leavers. The housing pathway that Basildon has adopted for care leavers is recognised by ECC and other Essex authorities as a model of good practice. Basildon Borough Council collaborates with ECC social care service to ensure the smooth transition into independent living for young people leaving care. This model reduces the need for care leavers to make a homeless application. It is a staged pathway towards independent living that will reduce the risk of failure. Without this care leavers may struggle to maintain a tenancy and lack the skills required to live independently, leading to possible loss of their tenancy and falling into debt.

Basildon borough has a number of supported housing facilities that provide young people with a period of transition from living in care to eventually living independently. Supported accommodation gives people an opportunity to learn life skills and find training and employment whilst living in a supportive environment.

iii) Education, Employment and Training

Compared to the general population, care leavers are less likely to be in education, employment or training, a situation that affects over a third of 19 year old care leavers. A good standard of education and subsequent employment often leads to further life opportunities and choices when challenging social determinants such as where people live, work and age.

Alongside our partners and the ECC Employability team, we will ensure that care leavers have the same or enhanced opportunities to access education, employment and training as other young people who have not lived in care.

iv) Health and Wellbeing

According to the Government's *Keep on Caring* report (July 2016), care leavers are four times more likely to develop a mental health disorder in contrast to the wider population. Overwhelmingly, the report states that the biggest issue raised by care leavers was one of isolation and loneliness; and the difficulty of navigating their way

through their late teens and early twenties without a strong and stable social network to support them. Their diet and their ability to join in group activities can also be limited for economic reasons.

By working with our partners we will support and enable care leavers to achieve an increase in good health and wellbeing by giving care leavers the same or enhanced opportunities as other young people who have not lived in care.

v) The Care Leaver Covenant

In 2018 the government launched the Care Leaver Covenant, which commits to provide work-based opportunities to young people leaving the care system. The Council supports the key principles of the Care Leaver Covenant, which are:

- that all parts of society have a responsibility to help care leavers to avoid poor outcomes and make a successful transition to adulthood; and
- that action to support care leavers should be in their best interests, promote their health and wellbeing and secure the best possible outcomes for them.

The Council will sign up to the Care Leaver Covenant and, with its partners, develop a Supporting Care Leavers strategy to deliver this policy in line with its principles and outcomes.

9. Corporate Promises

Basildon Borough Council is committed to improving the lives of our residents and creating opportunity and prosperity for local people and businesses. The delivery of the council's vision through its Corporate Plan 2019-22 is governed by a set of three core promises:

Corporate promises	High	Medium	Low	None
A place for everyone to call home	X			
A place where everyone prospers	X			
A place to be proud of		X		

10. Outcomes and priorities

This policy seeks to achieve the following Outcome and Priorities:

Outcome: Care leavers are supported in their transition from leaving care into independent living.

Priority 1: Care leavers are exempt from Council Tax as per the Essex Care Leavers and Council Tax Policy 2020.

Priority 2: Care leavers are supported to find a suitable home.

Priority 3: Care leavers' job and training opportunities are enhanced.

Priority 4: Care leavers enjoy improved health and wellbeing.

11. Monitoring

Basildon Borough Council will monitor the financial implications of the Essex Care Leavers and Council Tax Policy 2020 to ensure an unmanageable burden is not placed on this Council.

The allocation of council homes to care leavers will be monitored to ensure it meets Basildon Borough Council's allocation policy.

12. Links to other corporate policies and strategies

The Corporate Plan 2019-2022

Housing Allocations Scheme 2014 (amended 2017)

Essex Care Leavers and Council Tax Policy 2020

Financial Inclusion and Resilience Policy 2020

Health and Wellbeing Policy 2020

13. Appendices

Risk Assessment

Service Impact Assessment

Monday to Friday
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