**A summary: Care leavers and council tax exemption**

The issue of financial hardship and the impact of poverty on care leavers is well documented. Recent reports by The Children’s Society, ‘Wolf at the Door’ and the ‘Cost of Being Care Free’ demonstrate the financial vulnerability of care leavers. Care leavers are much more likely to be unfairly sanctioned by DWP; local authorities can be the worst creditors for care leavers to owe money to, for example in relation to council tax and rent arrears; and the variability of support means that the future life chances of care leavers are dependent on which local authority they were in care to.

**England**

In England there is parliamentary support for council tax exemption for care leavers until the age of 25 and this is written into the cross-departmental care leaver strategy. Local authorities in England have the power to exempt care leavers from council tax and a growing number are implementing this as part of their corporate parenting offer. The financial implications for local authorities are arguably negligible, for example estimates from the English local authorities to exempt all their care leavers up to the age of 25 range between £17k to £58k per year.

**Scotland**

Council Tax powers in Scotland, including exemptions, are determined by the Scottish Government through the [Local Government Finance Act 1992](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1992/55/enacted) although Council Tax is set, administered and collected by local authorities. In order to effect any exemption for care leavers as a group, to ensure it is available nationally would require action at Ministerial/Government level. The [Scottish Care Leavers Covenant](https://www.gov.scot/government/care-leavers-covenant), endorsed by many local authorities to support delivery on their corporate parenting and Aftercare responsibilities, as well as being supported by individual MSP’s from all the main parties, offers the principles for pursuing this change.

- **Care-proofing of policy**: Corporate parents recognise the vulnerability of care leavers as young adults, and prioritise and reference them in policy documents. Given the inequalities in opportunity encountered by care leavers, corporate parents will treat them as a ‘protected group’.

- **Assumption of entitlement**: Corporate parents will assume all care leavers are entitled to services, support and opportunities, up to their 26th birthday. Where discretion exists in definitions of vulnerability, or in giving priority access, these will be in favour of care leavers.

We ask you to take any necessary practical steps to ensure that Scotland’s care leavers benefit from the same financial arrangements in relation to council tax exemption as in other parts of the UK.