

Report to the Cabinet

Meeting to be held on Thursday, 4 November 2021

Report of the Head of Permanence Service

Part I

Electoral Division affected:
(All Divisions);

Corporate Priorities:
Caring for the vulnerable;

Extension of the Temporary Uplift to the Leaving Care Allowance

Contact for further information:

Andreas Feldhaar, Tel: 01772 538323, Practice Development Lead Permanence Service
andreas.feldhaar@lancashire.gov.uk

Brief Summary

Between April 2020 and October 2021, Lancashire County Council provided a temporary uplift to the Leaving Care Allowance of £20.00 per week, in line with the temporary increase of Universal Credit, to reduce the impact of the pandemic on eligible and relevant care leavers. Although the temporary increase of Universal Credit has now ceased, ending the temporary uplift of the Leaving Care Allowance at the current time would leave these care leavers vulnerable.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to approve the continued temporary uplift of Leaving Care Allowance of £20.00 per week, for eligible and relevant care leavers living in (semi-) independent accommodation until 31 January 2022, and for former relevant care leavers for a period of 5 weeks, to cover the waiting period after having made their first ever Universal Credit claim before 31 January 2022.

This decision should be implemented immediately for the purpose of Standing Order C28(3) as any delay could adversely affect the execution of the county council's responsibilities. The reason for this is to prevent unreasonable hardship for care leavers between the date of the Cabinet meeting, the call-in period and payments being made to care leavers. The officer's decision to provide immediate financial support to care leavers since 6 October 2021, only covers the period until 4 November 2021, the date of the Cabinet meeting.

Detail

Leaving Care Allowance is paid to eligible and relevant care leavers - young people aged 16/17 who either continue to be in the care of the county council, or those young people who were in our care aged 16/17 but no longer are, and live in (semi-) independent accommodation.

Leaving Care Allowance is also paid to former relevant care leavers - young adults who were eligible or relevant previously but who are now 18-25 years old - for a period of 5 weeks, to cover the waiting period from making their first ever Universal Credit claim. This would usually be applied for on the young person's 18th birthday.

Leaving Care Allowance is paid to these care leavers as they are responsible for paying for their own day to day expenses, living expenses and utilities. The Leaving Care Allowance is aligned to the Universal Credit rate to ensure financial support is provided in line with the financial minimum standards set by central government.

The current Universal Credit rate is £59.20 per week. Between April 2020 and October 2021, government provided a temporary increase of Universal Credit of £20.00 per week, to reduce the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people claiming benefits. Lancashire County Council matched this weekly increase of £20.00 by increasing the Leaving Care Allowance for eligible and relevant care leavers and former relevant care leavers, to reduce the impact of the pandemic on these young people.

The Universal Credit increase of £20.00 per week has now ceased. Ending the temporary increase of the Leaving Care Allowance of £20.00 per week at this time would create additional hardship for this group of young care leavers, due to the uncertainty of the continued impact of the pandemic over the winter period, young care leavers still developing their budgeting skills and therefore struggling with uncertainty, and unplanned changes and living expenses increasing over the winter due to higher utility payments. It is therefore proposed to extend the temporary increase of the Leaving Care Allowance of £20.00 per week until 31 January 2022.

The temporary continuation of the increase in the Leaving Care Allowance would enable social workers/personal advisors to provide planned and structured support to our young people in care and leaving care to:

- identify their immediate financial priorities;
- review and reduce their financial commitments and outgoings;
- further improve their budgeting and independent living skills based on a reduced income;
- secure alternative options to increase their income e.g. through volunteering or (part-time) employment.

This would reduce the financial, social and emotional impact of the immediate removal of the temporary increase of the Leaving Care Allowance on our young people in care and leaving care.

It would also allow social workers/personal advisors to:

- give clear and consistent messages to young people regarding their future financial entitlements to support these changes;
- prepare and strengthen the professional support network on this particular matter to further reduce any impact on the social or emotional wellbeing of our young people in care and leaving care.

Consultations

N/A

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Risk management

No significant risk management implications have been identified.

Financial

A decision taken under the Scheme of Delegation to Heads of Service has covered the immediate financial support required from 6 October 2021, the date the temporary Universal Credit uplift ended, until 4 November 2021, the date of the Cabinet meeting, at an approximate cost of £5,200.00.

The extension of the uplift in the Leaving Care Allowance for the period 4 November 2021 to 31 January 2022 is expected to cost approximately £15,600.00.

The Children's Social Care budget for 2021/22 includes provisions for additional COVID-19 related costs and the additional costs will be contained within the budget envelope.

Legal

There are no legal implications.

List of Background Papers

| Paper | Date | Contact/Tel |
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None

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A