



<b>Decision Maker:</b>	Cabinet Member for Finance and Council Reform
<b>Date:</b>	06 March 2024
<b>Classification:</b>	General Release
<b>Title:</b>	Council Tax Allowances for Foster Carers
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Policy Context:</b>	Fairer Council
<b>Key Decision:</b>	No
<b>Financial Summary:</b>	The estimated annual cost of a full (100%) council tax discretionary discount for Foster Carers would be £28,000.
<b>Report of:</b>	Martin Hinckley Director of Revenues and Benefits

## 1. Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks approval to extend the current 100% council tax hardship allowance (which is a discretionary allowance decided by the Council under section 13a of the Local Government Finance Act 1988) that is currently automatically awarded to care leavers to also include foster carers.

## 2. Recommendation

- 2.1 To approve the extension of the current 100% council tax hardship relief that is currently automatically awarded to care leavers to include foster carers with a start date of 1 April 2023.

## 3. Reason for decision

- 3.1 Extending the current 100% council tax hardship relief to include Foster Carers will assist with the current national shortage of foster carers. This also aligns with the Fairer Westminster strategy in valuing the work our carers do in making a difference to children's lives.

## **4. Background**

- 4.1 Our in-house foster carers provide a safe, secure, and nurturing family environment for children who cannot live with their families or on their own. A family setting is the preferred option for a looked after child and therefore recruiting and retaining foster carers is a key priority. As a corporate parent, arranging for foster carers to have a 100% Council Tax relief would demonstrate how the council values the work of our carers and the difference they make to children's lives.
- 4.2 There is a national shortage of foster carers that has made it increasingly difficult to meet demand levels and often results in relying on the external placement market, which is not only more costly but not always in the best interest of our cared for children. Formalising a 100% Council Tax relief would provide both welcome financial relief for our experienced foster carers and may encourage others to join our fostering service, enabling our children to be placed with local families that best reflect their background, culture and, wherever possible, are near to their own families, schools, and communities.
- 4.3 Some other local authorities currently provide a 100% Council Tax relief for their foster carers including Hammersmith and Fulham, Camden, Hackney, Hounslow, Newham, Southwark, and others outside London including Liverpool, Herefordshire, and Somerset.

## **5. Financial Implications**

- 5.1 For our foster carers living in borough we are proposing to secure a council tax hardship allowance (section 13a) of 100%. There are currently 15 Foster Carers living in Westminster. The estimated annual cost of a full 100% Council Tax relief for these carers would be £28,000.

## **6. Legal Implications**

- 6.1 The Director of Revenues and Benefits has delegated authority to award council tax hardship allowance for individual cases. The legislative provision which allows the Council to give this discretionary allowance has already been outlined above. This report will extend the previously agreed automatic award of 100% Hardship relief for care leavers to foster carers which will be funded from within existing budget.
- 6.2 The Cabinet Member Terms of Reference delegate the powers of this decision to the Cabinet Member. Paragraph 33.12 of the Council's Constitution requires that all Cabinet Member decisions must be published on the Council's website for five clear days before the decision is taken. Any representations received

during this period must be considered by the decision-maker before the decision is taken.

**7. Outstanding Issues**

7.1 There are no outstanding issues.

**8. Ward Member Consultation**

8.1 There is no requirement for separate Ward Member consultation as the report relates to all wards.

**If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers, please contact:**

Martin Hinckley, Director of Revenues and Benefits

**APPENDICES**

None

For completion by the **Cabinet Member for Finance and Council Reform**

**Declaration of Interest**

I have no interest to declare in respect of this report

Signed:  Date: 27 February 2024

NAME: **Councillor David Boothroyd**

State nature of interest if any .....

*(N.B: If you have an interest you should seek advice as to whether it is appropriate to make a decision in relation to this matter)*

For the reasons set out above, I agree the recommendation(s) in the report entitled **Council Tax Allowances for Foster Carers** and reject any alternative options which are referred to but not recommended.

Signed  .....

**Cabinet Member for Finance and Council Reform**

Date ...27 February 2024.....

If you have any additional comment which you would want actioned in connection with your decision you should discuss this with the report author and then set out your comment below before the report and this pro-forma is returned to the Secretariat for processing.

Additional comment: .....

If you do not wish to approve the recommendations, or wish to make an alternative decision, it is important that you consult the report author, the Head of Legal & Democratic Services, Director of Finance and, if there are resources implications, the Strategic Director of Resources (or their representatives) so that (1) you can be made aware of any further relevant considerations that you should take into account before making the decision and (2) your reasons for the decision can be properly identified and recorded, as required by law.

Note to Cabinet Member: Your decision will now be published and copied to the Members of the relevant Policy & Scrutiny Committee. If the decision falls within the criteria for call-in, it will not be implemented until five working days have elapsed from publication to allow the Policy and Scrutiny Committee to decide whether it wishes to call the matter in.