



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

Care Leavers and Broadband

**Children, Education and Health Scrutiny Committee
5 February 2024**



Care Leavers and Broadband

- At Council on 23rd September 2021 a motion was Proposed by Cllr Stone and Seconded by Cllr Alwahabi which was subsequently referred to Overview and Scrutiny:-

The Authority recognises the many challenges faced by care leavers. We have shown our commitment to them by taking away the burden of council tax for all care leavers until they reach the age of 25 years. We now commit to the provision of one year's free broadband for all young people leaving care, for the first 12 months.

Care Leavers and Broadband

- In WNC there are 452 Care Leavers aged 17-21 years with an average of 110 new care leavers each year
- Broadband costs vary. On reviewing, this starts at £20 a month (Three) with £36 a month (BT), with many providers around £25 (i.e., Vodaphone, PlusNet).
- Based on the mid-range package:
 - At £25 a month = £300 a year for each care leaver, we currently have 90 young people who are 18 (in their first year as a care leaver). This would cost around £27,000 for the current cohort.
 - We currently have 654 children in care, we get on average of 110 children who turn 18 and become a care leaver each year. Based on offering Broadband for the first 12 months this would be an annual cost of approximately £33,000 each year (reoccurring cost, around £165k for the next 5years).
 - However it needs to be noted that most contracts are for a minimum of 18months some 24months, therefore the commitment is likely to be between £49,500-£66,000 (for 5 yrs this will be up to £330,000)
- **Young Peoples Voice** – funding broadband for a year would be something they would like

Complexities

- How would the contract be managed? Not all children in care will be able to get a contract. There could be multiple providers which would require close monitoring and significant set up.
- Who would 'own' the contract? Council or Young Person?
 - How would this be funded, if the contract is with the young person already?
 - If the council hold the contract how is this passported to the young person to continue?
- How do we manage those in foster care/staying put placement and/or supported lodgings, as most of these will have Wi-Fi access within the home? (in fact we should stipulate it does).
- Most young people will have a phone which includes internet access.
- How would the funding be found each year? (up to £66,0000 per year re-occurring costs / up to £330,000 for 5 years)

Current Local Offer for Care Leavers

- Free/Reduced Council Tax
- Careers information and advice, including help with interviews and referrals to other organisations that can help.
- Help choosing the right university and course, help applying, and with getting tuition fees and loans.
- Help with transport costs for training, school/college, apprenticeships and job interviews.
- A Commencing Work Grant, so you have the right clothes for work and interviews.
- A Higher Education Bursary of £2,000, spread over the time of your course.
- One-off grants for a computer, stationery, books, trips and equipment, if you are in higher education. Somewhere to stay during holidays if you are in higher education. Transport costs for travelling to and from university (one return journey per academic year).
- If you're aged 17 to 21, there is an offer of an Introduction to Driving package:
 - 1 provisional driving license
 - 1 theory test
 - 5 (2 hour) driving lessons, or 10 (1 hour) driving lessons
 - 1 practical driving test

Current Local Offer for Care Leavers

- A Setting Up Home Allowance of at least £2,000 and up to £2,599. This can include things like a 1-year TV license, fitting a cooker, and contents insurance. There are lots of rules around this allowance, and help is provided to get the most out of this.
- Aged 16 to 19, are provided an allowance of £50 for Christmas or other important festivals.
- Access to a Rent Guarantor Scheme, and there is Rent and Deposit in advance support

And much more – which can be [found here](#)

Care Leavers can access Free Broadband:

- TalkTalk offers FREE broadband for 6 months (which can be extended) with unlimited data for those who are active job seekers – this is open to Care Leavers:
[FREE Broadband & Unlimited data for active job seekers - Care Leaver Covenant \(mycovenant.org.uk\)](https://www.mycovenant.org.uk)

Conclusion

- At this time, providing broadband is not considered a suitable offer, given the number of complexities and knowing (1) many of our YP have phones and internet access (2) many will have access to internet within their homes and most of all (3) they can access Free Broadband for 6 months when seeking employment and this can be extended if needed
- The care leaver local offer, has several support areas, offering advice, guidance, support and financial help, the local offer is constantly under review as we seek alternative ways to ensure support is in place
- There is currently not the funding to consider this offer at this time
- Broadband does not feel like an area to continue to explore at this time, but we will re visit in the future. We are reviewing other areas which would be supportive to care leavers.

Recommendation: Not to further pursue Broadband currently, but to consider:

- Ensuring providers such as supported lodgings have accessible Wi-Fi for those who live there
- Ensure fostering homes have accessible Wi-Fi for those in staying put
- Work with employers around social values and encouraging the recruitment and support of care leavers
- Continue to review this as a future option as part of the ongoing review of the local offer for care leavers