

Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee Review of the Leaving Care Grant

The Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee reviewed the Leaving Care Grant (LCG) on 15th August.

The meeting was attended by the Access & Enablement Manager and the Participation Worker for Children in Care. Through briefings and questioning, Members were provided information including:

- Edward Timpson's recommendations to Directors of Children Services to increase the grant to £2,000
- The statutory requirements and eligibility for the LCG
- The amount of the existing grant and when it was last reviewed
- How it is administered
- The views and recommendations of the Care Council (VOICE)
- The financial impact of increasing the grant to £1,500 and to £2,000
- The level of grant assuming increases in line with Council Tax increases
- How the amount in Telford & Wrekin compares to other authorities
- The breakdown of the cohort of 63 children in care aged 16/17 as of July 2013.

Members were concerned by a number of fundamental issues:

- That the grant of £1,000 had not been reviewed for 6-7 years
- That Telford & Wrekin had fallen behind most other authorities in the amount of the grant (95 had increased their LCG to at least £2000 between October 2012 and May 2013. In October the figure was 32.)
- There was no policy for administering the grant, no accountability for spending and there appeared to be no financial monitoring.
- There was no budget allocated for the grant.

Members felt that as a matter of principle and as a statement of its commitment to young people in care, care leavers in Telford & Wrekin should not be disadvantaged over those in other authority areas. The Committee is recommending that:

- 1. The Leaving Care Grant should be increased to £2,000 from April 2014**
- 2. The increase must be linked to the development of a Policy which is open and transparent, with clear lines of accountability**
- 3. The operation of the scheme should, in line with the views of the Care Council (VOICE), be linked to protocols around support for young people in achieving milestones in independent living**

The Committee heard that the adoption of a Care Leavers' Charter had been reviewed by VOICE and would be incorporated into the Council's Pledge to children and young people in care, and members requested a copy of the draft Pledge when it is released for consultation.

Report prepared by Stephanie Jones, Scrutiny Officer, 01952 383114
19th August 2013