

# Report of the Education & Children's Services Policy Overview Committee 2012/13

## Review into Children Leaving Care Procedure and Grant



### Members of the Committee

Cllr Catherine Dann (Chairman)  
Cllr Judith Cooper (Vice Chairman)  
Cllr John Hensley  
Cllr John Riley  
Cllr David Benson  
Cllr Susan O'Brien  
Cllr Jazz Dhillon  
Cllr Lindsay Bliss  
Mr Anthony Little



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# Chairman's Foreword



*I am delighted to present this review on the Leaving Care Procedure and Grant. As Corporate Parents for children in our care, we have a responsibility for ensuring that their transition to independent living outside of care is as smooth and as successful as possible. Part of this process involves the leaving care procedure and the grant which we pay to individuals. This grant has not been reviewed since 2003 which has meant that it has not kept pace with the costs of those essential items which any young person needs when setting up home.*

*The review was provided with an excellent overview of the current procedure for leaving care as well as details of the grant other local authorities gave care leavers. However, the most important information the review received was from two recent Hillingdon care leavers, together with a foster parent, who gave their first hand practical experience of leaving care and moving to independent living.*

*I would like to thank the external witnesses and officers for participating in the review and ask that Cabinet kindly consider the recommendations contained in the report.*

*Catherine Dann*

**Councillor Catherine Dann  
Chairman of the Education & Children's Services Policy Overview  
Committee**

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Following its review the Education and Children's Services Policy Overview Committee has made the following recommendations to Cabinet:

**RECOMMENDATION 1: That to assist care leavers making the transition to independent living, that an existing Housing Officer for care leavers be designated to them, to enable a smooth transition and to take forward the following:**

- (i) To work with care leavers and their social care officers to discuss in detail their move into their tenancy. This discussion to provide details and advice on the condition and standard of the tenancy they are moving into and advice and guidance on entitlements in relation to decorating and general repairs.
- (ii) To provide advice in relation to the logistics and costs of removals into the new tenancy.
- (iii) To work with care leavers and their social care officers to enable the necessary preparations to be made to enable them to move into their new tenancy within acceptable time-scales.
- (iv) To investigate whether businesses and partners have schemes which could help care leavers with decorating their new tenancies.
- (vi) To provide guidance to care leavers in their Leaving Care Plan on the benefits of joining a credit union or other savings schemes. In addition to include information on the importance of household insurance.

**RECOMMENDATION 2: That support be given to a campaign to ask residents to donate household goods to charities such as the Trinity Homeless Project and that care leavers be advised that they could purchase essential items this way.**

**RECOMMENDATION 3: That consideration be given to a process being set up whereby care leavers who had made the transition to independent living, acted as mentors for new care leavers.**

**RECOMMENDATION 4: That information on the entitlement of the Leaving Care Grant be given to all Looked after Children, including unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people. This could be promoted through the existing Kids in Care web pages and recorded in the pathway plan of all care leavers who meet the criteria for a grant.**

**RECOMMENDATION 5: That Officers be asked to investigate the feasibility of changing the current purchasing arrangements of essential**

items for care leavers to enable them to purchase the items for themselves.

**RECOMMENDATION 6:** That further work takes place on helping care leavers access the local social fund if required.

**RECOMMENDATION 7:** That the Leaving Care grant be increased to a maximum of £1500 (or £1800 for those in exceptional circumstances) and considered as part of the budget planning process for 2013/14 onwards.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **OBJECTIVES**

The objective of the review was to investigate the current leaving care process and grant, and to examine whether the current grant meets the needs of Hillingdon's children leaving care population.

The terms of reference of the review were as follows:

- To examine the current eligibility for the payment of the Leaving Care Grant
- To review the process of dispensing the grant
- To assess whether the amount of the grant adequately meets the needs of care leavers
- To investigate how this Council's grant compares with its statistical and geographical neighbours
- To make recommendations to Cabinet on the outcome of the review.

To meet the objectives of the review Members held 2 meetings on 7 June and 12 September 2012, when background information and evidence was received to help the Committee in forming their findings.

The information, evidence and findings of the review are set out in the next sections under the following headings:

1. Information and analysis.
2. Evidence and enquiry.
3. Recommendations.

## **INFORMATION AND ANALYSIS**

### **What is the Leaving Care Grant?**

The Leaving Care Grant is also known as the “Setting Up Home Allowance”. Former eligible young people who have moved to independent living after leaving care, are entitled to a “Setting Up Home Allowance”. The allowance is intended to provide the essential items needed to start up a home.

The allowance can be given out in one sum or in instalments when the young person leaves care. The amount that is given out is dependent on the needs/circumstances of the care leaver; for example whether they just need a few items for when they move into shared or semi independent accommodation or to furnish an empty flat when they secure a tenancy.

Previously, many Councils including Hillingdon, used to keep a ‘store’ of items that had been donated. These included suites, beds, cookers, fridges, etc. which could be made available to any Council tenants in need, such as those leaving refuges or hostels or leaving care. This practice no longer exists, largely for reasons to do with health and safety. However, these stores of items helped to keep costs of furnishing accommodation down.

The grant does not normally cover areas such as the connection of gas appliances, flooring, household insurance or TV licences. There is also variation in what local authorities expect the grant to cover.

For the review the Committee identified the following key issues, which helped Members reach their conclusions:

### **Key Issues**

- Care leavers depart the security of their care establishment /placement at a younger age than their peers, usually at the age from 16-18. This is in stark contrast to their peers, who in a family setting will still have the option to return when they leave home. Care leavers have no such safety net.
- Care leavers have to cope with the emotional and practical factors of living independently at a much younger age. They are expected to undertake their journey to adulthood, far younger and in far less time than their peers.
- Care leavers are expected to manage the transition into adulthood whilst maintaining their education /seeking employment and managing their tenancy/accommodation. They are usually not yet established in employment and have no or little access to disposable income which would enable them to take full responsibility for equipping their own homes.

- There is no agreement across the country about how much money a young person should receive as a setting up home grant when they are allocated their first tenancy. However, the Government has recently on the 30<sup>th</sup> November 2012, in the launch of the Charter for Care Leavers recommended that local authorities consider increasing the grant to at least £2000.



## **EVIDENCE & ENQUIRY**

Witness sessions for the review were held on the 30 July 2012 and on 12 September 2012.

The Committee advice from the Council's Corporate Parenting Manager, together with hearing the views, first hand, of two care leavers, a foster carer and the Council's Team Manager of the 16+ Leaving Care Team.

In addition, the Council's Deputy Director of Social Care and Health attended the September meeting and helpfully contributed to the formulation of the Committee's recommendations.

For the review reference was made to two landmark legal judgements which had implications for care leavers and the Leaving Care Grant.

### **Hillingdon Judgement**

In 2003 the Hillingdon Judgement was made and the grant was set at £1000; the grant has since not been reviewed. The impact of the judgement on Hillingdon and other local authorities has been an increased demand on resources, both financially and on its social care workforce. It meant that unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people who were previously supported under the Children Act 1989, Section 17 funding and who were not considered to be looked after, would, after the judgement be deemed to be looked after. They were therefore entitled to care leaving services, including receipt of the leaving care grant. Follow the link below for details of the Hillingdon Judgement.<sup>1</sup>

### **Southwark Judgement**

The Southwark Judgement (May 2009) fundamentally realigned the housing responsibilities for homeless 16 and 17 year olds. In the judgement, the House of Lords made it clear that the Children Act 1989 takes priority over the Housing Act 1996 (section 188) in providing for children in need, and that the duties of local children's services authorities to accommodate children in need should not be avoided by referring cases of young people to the housing authority. Furthermore, where a 16 or 17 year old young person presents as homeless to a Local Authority and is assessed as requiring accommodation, in all but a few exceptional cases these young people will meet the criteria for accommodation under Section 20 of the Children Act and therefore will become Looked After Children (LAC), with all that entails. Prior to the judgement, homeless 16 and 17 year olds were entitled to Income Support and Housing Benefit to cover their living costs and accommodation charges.

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<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/OneStopCMS/Core/CrawlerResourceServe1r.aspx?resource=8C637D9A-E8B2-4489-807B-9CF8CC691586&mode=link&guid=3222d040e60e4f76b1e08f2ee70861e3>

Following the judgement responsibility for meeting these costs transferred to Children's Services.<sup>2</sup>

## **Legislative Framework**

The provision of leaving care services is delivered within the framework of the following legislation:

- The Children Act 1989
- The Children Leaving Care Act 2000
- The Children Leaving Care Regulations and Guidance 2001
- The Children Act 2004
- The Children and Young Person's Act 2008
- Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 -Planning Transitions to Adulthood for Care Leavers guidance Volume 3

The 1989 Children Act gave local authorities new powers and duties in relation to children leaving care, but it was not until the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 that there was specific reference to the financial support needed by care leavers and a clear statement that this should be the responsibility of their local authority. The Green Paper that led to the 2000 Act stated that:

“Young people living independently for the first time need help with the start up costs associated with furnishing their flat and starting work or higher education. Many local authorities give young people leaving care grants to meet these costs. We expect local authorities should meet these costs to help young people make a good start to living independently”.

Further legislative changes consolidated and extended local authorities' responsibilities towards care leavers. The Children and Young Persons Act 2008, has gone a long way towards redressing some of the gaps left by the Leaving Care Act, but on the matter of awarding leaving care grants it has been less explicit. The most recent change in regulations (Care Leavers Regulations 2010) has extended the duty of support to over 21 year olds who return to seek support to access further education or training. This in practice means that a care leaver who was no longer supported post 21 because they were not in education; can now return before the age of 25 to seek support if they wish to take up education or training to improve their employment opportunities.

In August 2003, the Hillingdon Judgement found that some people who had been supported under Section 17 had essentially been 'looked after' as defined by Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, rather than 'assisted' under Section 17 and were therefore entitled to leaving care support. The Hillingdon Judgment ruled that local authorities owe a duty of care under the Act to

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<sup>2</sup> <http://resources.leavingcare.org/uploads/87fe6ee0fa282a244ec64e4fab764aca.pdf>

young asylum seekers and refugees aged 18 to 24 years who were previously supported by social services, including those children who were fully supported under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989.

### Number of young people who leave care

The latest Department for Education (DfE) statistics (2011) indicate that nationally out of 65,000 children who are looked after by local authorities, approximately 9000 aged 16+ leave care annually. The number of young people in and leaving care has increased. Thus, local authorities have to make increasingly diminishing resources go further to meet the needs of more young people

Figures released by the DfE for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011 show that nationally the number of young people who are entering care at an older age (16/17) has increased. The number of over 16s that have started to be looked after each year has increased by 66% over the past 5 years, compared to only a 20% increase in under 1's being taken into care. This has meant that local authorities have had to adapt services to meet the needs of late entrants.

In Hillingdon, the increase for young people entering care at 16/17 reflects the national trend although the increase has been small as shown in the table below.

	10/11	11/12											12/13		
	Mar 11	Apr 11	May 11	Jun 11	Jul 11	Aug 11	Sep 11	Oct 11	Nov 11	Dec 11	Jan 12	Feb 12	Mar 12	Apr 12	May 12
Under 1	4%	3%	4%	4%	4%	5%	4%	4%	5%	4%	4%	3%	3%	4%	4%
1-4	11%	11%	11%	10%	11%	11%	11%	11%	11%	12%	13%	14%	15%	14%	14%
5-9	11%	10%	10%	9%	9%	10%	10%	9%	10%	11%	12%	11%	11%	11%	11%
10-12	11%	11%	10%	10%	11%	10%	10%	10%	11%	11%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%
13-15	31%	30%	31%	32%	33%	31%	31%	31%	30%	29%	27%	27%	28%	26%	25%
16-17	33%	35%	35%	34%	32%	33%	34%	35%	33%	34%	34%	34%	34%	35%	35%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Recent changes in the Care Leavers Regulations 2010 have extended care leaving services to young people until the age of 25. Local authorities could now potentially have leaving care duties to almost 80,000 young people (not including 'qualifying' young people). 'Qualifying' young people are those who:

- Left care after 1st October 2001 after the age of 16 but are not 'eligible' or 'relevant' because they did not fulfil the 13 week criteria
- Left care before 1st October 2001

- Were accommodated in a variety of other settings, for example residential education, or mental/health provision or private fostering or Special Guardianship.

Many young people who have been brought up in public care are estranged from their families and have no-one but the state, their 'corporate parent' to rely upon to help them get started in adult life. The Leaving Care Grant is intended to ensure that young people have the basic essentials to move into their first home.

The Office for National Statistics (2011) report says that many young adults in their mid 20's and early 30's are increasingly postponing the transition to adulthood. In the UK the average age at which young adults in the general population leave home permanently is 24. <sup>3</sup>Children leave care at 16, 17 or 18.

The Council does not provide a grant for those who leave at 16 or 17. So not only can they not rely on the parental home to provide some of the basic items collected by parents for their offspring in their 'bottom drawer', they are also not yet established in employment and have no access to disposable income which would enable them to take full responsibility for equipping their own homes.

It is not just about the age of leaving care that is the problem, it is the journey. Unlike young people in a family setting who might leave home in their teens but always have the option to return; care leavers have no such safety net. They are expected to leave their residential establishment or foster placement, and are either placed in supported accommodation, or move directly into independence with support from social services leaving care teams.

To keep a child in care for 4 years, (based on current costs) a local authority might spend between £166,000 and £1,100,000. (this is dependent on the type of placement). It is therefore important to provide adequate financial leaving care support when the young person needs it given this crucial transition point in their lives.

### **Hillingdon's Leaving Care Population**

For the purpose of the review, the Committee considered care leavers aged 16-21, as the leaving care grant applies in majority to this age group. Young people who are 16 and are ready for semi independent living (following an assessment) can move into semi independent or supported accommodation. Care leavers over 21 would no longer be supported by the local authority if they are not in education or training. However under the new regulations, post 21 they can return to request support if they wish to continue with education

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<sup>3</sup>(<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/population/index.html>)

or training. The nature of the support is determined following an assessment and would not necessarily apply to the dispensation of the leaving care grant.

Hillingdon's current care leaving population is 434 aged 16-21. (June 2012)  
This is broken down to :

- 165 - local young people
- 269 – Unaccompanied asylum seeking children / young people. (UASC)

### Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young People

The numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking young people who are looked after have gradually decreased in the past year as seen in the table below.

	2010/11	2011 - 2012													
	Mar 11	Apr 11	May 11	Jun 11	Jul 11	Au11	Sep 11	Oct 11	Nov 11	De11	Jan 12	Feb 12	Mar 12	Apr 12	May 12
Local	69%	68%	66%	67%	68%	68%	69%	69%	71%	71%	74%	73%	73%	74%	73%
UASC	31%	32%	34%	33%	32%	32%	31%	31%	29%	29%	26%	27%	27%	26%	27%

Not all of the current population of 269 unaccompanied asylum seeking young people are eligible for the grant as eligibility is dependent on the immigration status of the young person. Discounting those who are ineligible, only 210 of the current population are eligible for the grant.

Those who are ineligible are UASC who have:

- asylum appeals pending - 10
- had their appeals refused - 8
- have gone missing - 2
- exhausted all appeals – 39

This would give a total of 375 (165 local young people + 210 UASC) care leavers in 2012 who would be eligible. However not all will claim the full grant at the same time as the grant is only given to care leavers who obtain permanent social housing or privately rented accommodation whilst waiting for council social housing.

The figures below show the number of care leavers that have been offered social housing by LBH since 2007.

Calendar Year	Number of LBH residents Housed	Number Housed that are Care Leavers
2007	326	2
2008	259	8
2009	316	13
2010	296	15

2011	245	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>1442</b>	<b>47</b>

It is anticipated that the number of care leavers each year reaching the age of 18 over the next 2 years will be between 50 and 60.

This cohort will include a number of 18 year old care leavers each year who will remain in the supported housing options prior to pursuing courses for example at university or because they are not yet ready to live fully independently. This cohort will also include some asylum seeking care leavers who do not have the correct immigration status to be eligible for housing. It is therefore reasonable to predict that the demand for council social housing in reality will be in the region of 35 to 45 per year.

### **Comparisons with neighbouring Local Authorities**

There is no agreement nationally about how much money a young person should receive as a leaving care grant when they get their first flat. In 2003 the care leaver led charity, a National Voice (ANV) recommended a figure of £1400 based on research undertaken with young people. Other research and surveys conducted since 2003 have all made recommendations for increases. These were based on 'shopping basket' research and consultations with care leavers. The study undertaken by the University of York (2006) on the costs and outcomes for young people leaving care highlighted the need to provide adequate financial support to care leavers. In 2009 a survey carried out by Children and Young People Now found that variances in the grant ranged from £500 to £2200.

The most recent research published by the Care Leaver's Foundation in October 2011 on setting up grants for care leavers recommended a minimum of £3000, as a 'shopping basket' exercise carried out by care leavers found that the cost of essential items ranged from £2786.93 and £2900

The table below shows the amount of the grant given out by Hillingdon's Statistical and Geographical neighbours.

<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>Leaving Care Grant 2011</b>
<b>Statistical Neighbours</b>	
Barnet	£2000
Bexley	£1500
Bedford	£1750
Coventry	£1500
Derby	£2000
Havering	£1500
Hounslow	£1250-£1400
Milton Keynes	£2464

Reading	£1750
Hillingdon	£1000
Slough	£750
<b>Geographical Neighbours</b>	
Ealing	£1000
Harrow	£1500
Buckinghamshire	£1000
Hammersmith and Fulham	£1500

### **Hillingdon's Leaving Care Grant**

The review was informed that all care leavers have their needs assessed at age 15+ and a Pathway Plan is then drawn up with the young person. This identifies and records their career/employment/training needs and how they will be supported to achieve the objectives. Included in the plan is also their accommodation needs, stating the kind of housing option, be it supported, shared or semi independent leading to permanent housing . The Pathway Plan also contains an agreement on financial planning and the payment of the leaving care grant. The Plan is reviewed every 6 months and provides the care leaver with a plan with clear goals.

Following the implementation of the Children Leaving Care Grant in 2000, Hillingdon gave those care leavers who qualified for the grant, a sum of £1,500. However, following the Hillingdon Judgement in 2003, the grant was reduced to £1000 to take into account the increase in demand by a larger care leaving population. There has been no review of the grant since 2003.

The review was informed that Hillingdon's current leaving care grant continues to be pegged at £1000 and can be given out in instalments. This is dependent on what the care leaver needs when they move into temporary/permanent accommodation. Hillingdon care leavers who are eligible to apply for permanent social housing have to do so via LOCATA.

The leaving care teams for both unaccompanied asylum seeking young people and local young people dispense the leaving care grant according to the individual needs of the young people. The practice is to not give out the full grant until the care leaver moves into permanent accommodation. However there are circumstances when a care leaver who moves into supported, semi independent or shared housing is given a proportion of the grant to purchase additional items that are not provided by the landlords. When such items are purchased, it is with the understanding that the care leaver takes these items with them when they move.

The grant does not allow for the costs of providing flooring in all the rooms and neither does it cover the cost of household insurance. Judgement of what is considered essential is left to the support worker/personal advisor and the young person. So if the care leaver needs more household items and little is

left from the £1000, then flooring is limited to the essential areas which include the lounge, bathroom and kitchen.

The allowance is also insufficient to cover moving costs, which are considered as extra costs. The £1000 also has to cover the costs of connecting gas/electrical appliances. A Hillingdon care leaver recently carried out a 'shopping basket' exercise of essential items. The total came to £2046 at 2012 prices. This excluded flooring.

### **How do care leavers purchase essential items?**

When care leavers are given the grant to purchase essential items they are assisted by their personal advisors or social workers who will purchase items using the council's internal purchasing system. This in practice sometimes means the administrative officer goes shopping with the care leaver as payment for the purchases is made with the council P-card. Social workers and personal advisors are currently not issued with P-cards.

The care leaver can also have their purchases ordered via the Council's internal ordering process, which involves placing a purchase order with the preferred stores such as Argos. This does however limit the choice of stores and care leavers are not necessarily buying from stores which offer the best value and price. If the care leaver purchases items from markets or second hand shops they must produce a receipt before the money is reimbursed directly into their bank accounts.

Care Leavers are encouraged to save for the expenses of setting up home. Those who are in foster care until they reach 18 are more likely to have savings as foster carers support the young people with this in their preparation for leaving care. Care leavers who are placed in semi independent accommodation when they are 16 are unlikely to have any significant savings as their weekly budget for subsistence is just sufficient to cover essential weekly items.

### **Trinity Homeless Projects**

Members were made aware of the work which Trinity Homeless Projects did, and how care leavers could use their services. This was a charity organisation who were committed to helping individuals achieve sustainable independent living and life transformation. They provided furniture for people who were moving to independent living and had a shop based in Uxbridge.

### **Community Care Grant**

Previously, care leavers were also encouraged and supported to apply for a Community Care Grant, which was financial assistance given to help someone to live independently in the community. However, to qualify for the grant a care leaver had to be in receipt of either income support or job seeker's allowance and likely to start getting one of these benefits within the



next six weeks of leaving care. Based on the number of rejections that have been received by care leavers in Hillingdon, it has been concluded that it is difficult to obtain this grant. The Department of Works and Pension is aware that care leavers have access to the leaving care grants from local authorities and expect local authorities to fulfil their responsibilities.

The review was made aware that the Community Care Grant was soon to be decentralised and would be replaced by a Local Social Fund.

### **Feedback from Witnesses**

To help the Committee with their review, two care leavers, and a foster parent attended a meeting and provided Members with their experience of leaving care, the procedure which took place and details on the suitability of the amount of grant given to care leavers.

- Care leavers when moving into their first tenancy found that the existing Leaving Care Grant was not sufficient in some cases to cover the costs of buying essential items
- In some cases the grant did not cover costs such as removal costs, needed repairs for the tenancy they were moving into (flooring, repairs to walls, decorating etc). This area needed to be communicated more clearly to care leavers
- Care leavers wanted to make their new tenancies homely and be able to do this independently, but the grant was not sufficient to do this
- Experiences varied, as some care leavers had the support of foster parents when making the transition to independent living. This was a help in terms of providing essential items to facilitate the move
- From the experiences of the two care leavers, the Council accommodation they had moved into had not been in good condition, which they believed should have been brought up to an acceptable standard before occupancy. Part of their Leaving Care Grant had been spent on bringing the accommodation up to an acceptable level which had reduced the amount left for essential items
- Both the care leavers had not been aware that the costs of repairs and decorations had to be deducted from their grant
- To reduce the costs, both care leavers had carried out repairs and decorating themselves
- Care leavers were provided with guidance and information on how to access the grant and the process was easy to understand
- Social workers had helped the care leavers buy essential items but help had also been given by foster parents
- The purchases had to be made using the Council's P-Card which made the purchasing process bureaucratic and meant that care leavers could not purchase items themselves
- The 16+ Leaving Care Team supported the care leavers during the transition to independent living

- Each care leaver's needs were individually assessed to measure the level and type of support they needed
- Care leavers believed that the amount of the grant should be increased to allow leavers to furnish their tenancy with essential items (including flooring if necessary), the connection of appliances and removal costs
- Reference was made to the benefits of care leavers who had made the transition to independence, mentoring new care leavers
- The foster parent referred to some care leavers wanting to have minimal assistance with the transition to independent living due to having most of the decisions in their life being taken by the authorities and other people
- The foster parent had helped his care leavers by providing some of the essential items such as furniture
- Reference was made to the need for clarity on unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people entitlement to the leaving care grant as the foster parent had not been aware of this.
- The foster parent suggested that it would be useful if there was additional funding available for care leavers in emergencies, which could be held by their Social Worker
- Reference was made to neighbouring local authorities who diverted care leavers to Charity organisations for furniture and that this could be an option for Hillingdon
- There were difficulties in care leavers accessing the Community Care Grant from the Department of Works and Pensions. This grant provided financial assistance to help someone live independently in the community.
- The two care leavers referred to the choices they had to make when moving into their own accommodation due to the level of finance available. Expenditure was prioritised and items such as insurance were sometimes not purchased
- Reference was made to Hillingdon's Leaving Care Grant being low in comparison to the Borough's statistical and geographical neighbours

## Conclusions

The review considered all the information which had been provided by officers on the historical background to the leaving care grant and Members noted that the grant's amount had not been reviewed since 2003. Reference was made to research and surveys which had been conducted since 2003 which have all made recommendations for increases.

The information given to the review by the two care leavers indicated that the present grant was not sufficient to enable care leavers to satisfactorily make an easy transition to independent living. The cost of essential items had risen since 2003 and the grant had not increased to reflect this.

The review was also informed that within the Council there was an Officer who was responsible for housing for care leavers and a number of the recommendations of the review could be taken forward by this officer. It was agreed that this designated Housing Officer for care leavers could take forward many of the recommendations of the review.

Information was also provided on the minimum lettable standard for Council property as witnesses had expressed their concern at the condition of the properties they had moved into. The review was informed that the over riding aim was to achieve a quick letting of an empty Council property. Therefore only essential work was carried out, both to minimise the time that the contractor was in the property, and to ensure that the property was of a habitable standard for the new tenant.

The care leavers who helped the Committee with their review provided strong evidence that they did receive a good level of support from social workers and foster parents during the transition after leaving care. However, the review felt that it was important that a designated Housing officer for care leavers could provide comprehensive support in relation to advice and entitlement to all care leavers to enable them ALL to receive the correct professional advice and guidance.

After consideration of the information provided by officers and the evidence provided by the witnesses, Members agreed that the following should form the recommendations of the review.

**RECOMMENDATION 1: That to assist care leavers making the transition to independent living, that a Housing Officer for care leavers be designated to them, to enable a smooth transition and to take forward the following:**

- (i) To work with care leavers and their social care officers to discuss in detail their move into their tenancy. This discussion to provide details and advice on the condition and standard of the tenancy they are moving into and advice and guidance on entitlements in relation to decorating and general repairs.**

- (ii) To provide advice in relation to the logistics and costs of removals into the new tenancy.
- (iii) To work with care leavers and their social care officers to enable the necessary preparations to be made to enable them to move into their new tenancy within acceptable time-scales.
- (iv) To investigate whether businesses and partners have schemes which could help care leavers with decorating their new tenancies.
- (v) To provide guidance to care leavers in their Leaving Care Plan on the benefits of joining a credit union or other savings schemes. In addition to include information on the importance of household insurance.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** That support be given to a campaign to ask residents to donate household goods to charities such as the Trinity Homeless Project and that care leavers be advised that they could purchase essential items this way.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** That consideration be given to a process being set up whereby care leavers who had made the transition to independent living, acted as mentors for new care leavers.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** That information on the entitlement of the Leaving Care Grant be given to all Looked after Children, including unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people. This could be promoted through the existing Kids in Care web pages and recorded in the pathway plan of all care leavers who meet the criteria for a grant.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:** That Officers be asked to investigate the feasibility of changing the current purchasing arrangements of essential items for care leavers to enable them to purchase the items for themselves.

**RECOMMENDATION 6:** That further work takes place on helping care leavers access the local social fund if required.

**RECOMMENDATION 7:** That the Leaving Care grant be increased to a maximum of £1500 (or £1800 for those in exceptional circumstances) and considered as part of the budget planning process for 2013/14 onwards.