

Staying Close Pilot for Care Experienced Young People

Report of the Director of Children and Young People's Futures

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

Recommendations to Cabinet:

- a) To note that the Council has secured £1.14 million of funding from the Department for Education for the Wave 3 Staying Close initiative.
- b) To approve the Staying Close implementation plan.

Summary of Cabinet Paper

- Devon County Council (DCC) has been awarded a revenue grant from the Department for Education (DfE) to pilot Staying Close in Devon.
- Staying Close is a national initiative which provides an enhanced support package for young people leaving care. It is designed to be a comparable offer to the option of Staying Put (for young people who wish to remain with their foster carers following their 18th birthday). Staying Close provides an offer of move-on accommodation, alongside a package of practical and emotional support, provided by someone who they know and trust. These bespoke packages of support help develop confidence and skills for independent living, and emotional health and wellbeing.
- The grant would cover the cost of employing Accommodation Support Workers, and other commissioned support services for young people leaving care in properties funded separately by rent and/or benefits that the young people are entitled to.
- Any posts funded by the grant would be 100% externally funded for the 2-year pilot and do not require additional financial contribution from the council.
- The sufficiency strategy is the mechanism by which children's services seeks to anticipate the need for a range of different accommodation for looked after children and care leavers.
- Devon currently has a number of young people who are unable to leave high cost care placements due to a lack of alternative provision for young people age 18+ which can meet their support needs.
- £203,000 may need to be funded from existing council budgets within the pilot period.
- The estimated potential savings over the lifetime of the project from providing a suitable alternative for these young people is £2.167 million, with the potential for an ongoing saving of £746,000 per year after the DfE funding ends.
- The Council's Staying Close sustainability plan after 2025 will in part depend on DfE's decision to fund Staying Close, however this model is more financially sustainable compared to the arrangements currently in use.

Developing a Staying Close offer in Devon using DfE funding would support the objectives of the Council's sufficiency strategy, corporate parenting strategy and recommendations made in the Independent Social Care Review.

1) Introduction

- 1.1 The Council secured a revenue grant of £1.147 million in May 2023 from the Department for Education following a successful bid for funding under the Wave 3 Staying Close programme.
- 1.2 The revenue grant is to be used over the next 2 years to pilot Staying Close for care experienced young people aged 18 plus. During this period the project will be evaluated as part of a national programme led by Foundations (formally known as What Works Centre for Children and Families), the focus of which will be improving outcomes and revenue savings.
- 1.3 The successful Staying Close bid submitted sets out how the Council will use up to 6 buildings to accommodate a minimum of 24 care experienced young people aged 18+ in high and medium needs provision. The young people will benefit from the support of accommodation support workers, based in the intensive support property and with a small caseload to enable them to offer a higher level of support for between 12 and 18 months, depending on the needs of the young people.
- 1.4 The business case for submitting a bid for funding under the wave 3 Staying Close programme was taken to Children's Services Leadership Team on 15th February 2023 and approval was given to submit the bid to the Department for Education.
- 1.5 The business case and proposal were taken to Children's Scrutiny in June 2023 who commented that "The Committee welcomes the sufficiency initiatives outlined in the report and recommends the programme to Cabinet when it considers the report."
- 1.6 These services will enable the Council to provide supported accommodation for care experienced young people who are currently living in high cost supported accommodation for 16–18-year-olds and residential children's homes. The Staying Close offer will provide more tailored support, with a focus on relationships built with the young person before they leave care, which is better suited to the transition of these young people to independent living.
- 1.7 Following publication of the Independent Social Care Review in 2022 the government has indicated a commitment to the provision of supported accommodation for care experienced young people aged 18+. Staying Close 2023-25 guide for local authorities states that "we will be bringing forward legislation for Staying Close to be a **national entitlement** and for Staying Close to support young people up to age 23, recognising that young people in the

general population are leaving home at older ages.”¹ Drawing down the funding awarded under wave 3 will give us an opportunity to develop our offer with the benefit of funding attached in the first few years to help us develop our capacity.

- 1.8 The Council will be required to provide quarterly returns to the DFE on the progress and expenditure associated with the grant. The first will be required on September 29 2023. There is an expectation that services will commence between October 2023 and January 2024.

2) Background Information

- 2.1 The numbers of young people in 16+ supported accommodation has increased since April 2021. In April 2021, 60 young people were accommodated in 16+ supported accommodation placements. This number has risen to 107 young people in April 2023. This is an increase of 78% over 2 years.
- 2.2 Of the 107, young people placed in 16+ supported accommodation placements, 28 were aged 18+. The oldest young person placed in 16+ accommodation at that time was 20 years and 8 months old.
- 2.3 The increase in the number of young people in 16+ supported accommodation is projected to continue over the next period. This is partly due to the increase in Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) aged 16+ but also the number of children in residential and foster care moving to supported accommodation.
- 2.4 The Council has arrangements in place with District Councils to jointly support young people leaving care at 18 who require a semi-independent option as part of their transition. In 2022-23 205 care leavers were supported by specialist housing workers for young people based in District Councils and as at the 31st March 2023 44 care leavers were accessing supported accommodation, where the accommodation was funded by District Councils and support funded by DCC. However, this route does not meet the needs of all young people, which can be demonstrated by the number of young people remaining in care placements post 18. As of April 2023, DCC had 28 care experienced young people aged 18 or above in supported accommodation placements, and five 18-year-olds in residential children’s homes. They remained in these settings because they were not ready to move into independent living, social housing, or other move on options.
- 2.5 Feedback from providers and front-line workers is that move on from residential children’s homes and supported accommodation is a challenge for the following reasons:
- Finding suitable options for young people whose needs are not met within the current provision, including young people in need of mental health support.
 - High levels of demand for housing, particularly in Exeter where there are more employment and education opportunities.
 - Young people who come into a care placement at a late age and require time in a stable environment before they are ready to consider move-on options.

¹ [Staying Close 2023 to 2025: application guide for local authorities \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1141212/staying-close-2023-to-2025-application-guide-for-local-authorities.pdf)

- The introduction of Ofsted registration for supported accommodation providers for 16- and 17-year-olds in care may further reduce sufficiency for care leavers age 18+, as it is anticipated that providers will prioritise delivering services for the cohort of young people that their registration covers. There is also the potential impact that some providers will not meet the quality thresholds implemented by Ofsted, and this will have an impact on 16/17 placement sufficiency and therefore providers ability to support young people 18 and over in the way they have to date i.e., regular extension past 18.

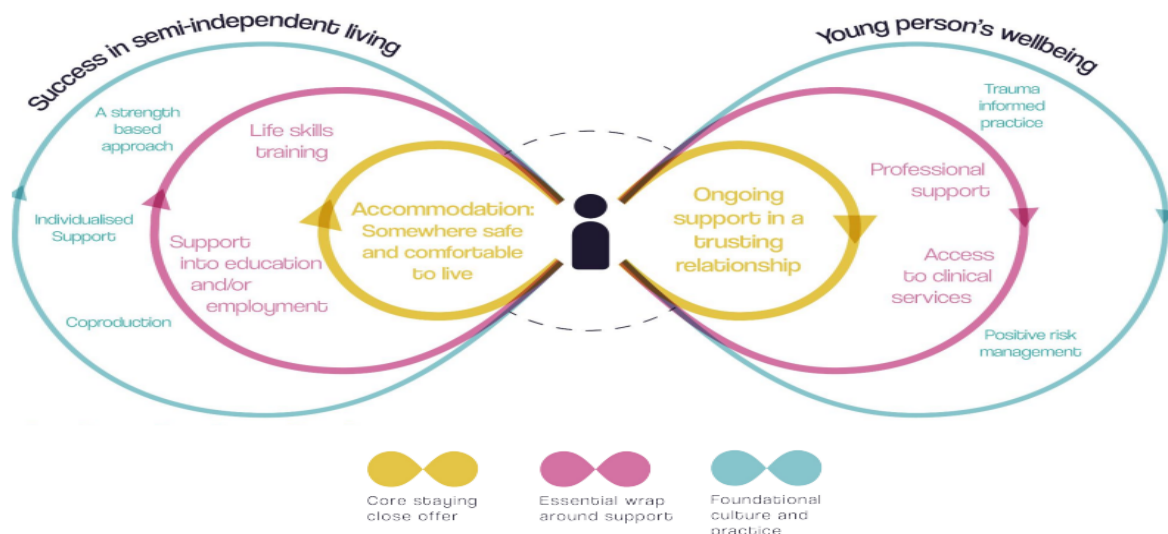
2.6 Securing move on accommodation with appropriate levels of support for care experienced young people will have a number of benefits:

- Reduced use of homeless accommodation for care leavers, including the use of B&Bs.
- Better supportive pathways for children as they leave care and become independent reducing cost in the long-term.
- Good quality accommodation for young people to support the transition to independence.
- Increase availability of 16-17 supported accommodation for children in care as 18+ young people will be able to move to more independent options.
- Reduced use of high cost supported accommodation for 18+ care experienced young people.

3) Proposal

3.1 The council will secure up to 6 buildings to accommodate a minimum of 24 care experienced young people aged 18+ in high and medium needs provision. The young people will benefit from the support of an accommodation support worker who is based in the intensive support property and with a much lower caseload to enable them to offer a higher level of support for between 12 and 18 months, depending on their needs.

3.2 A set of other support services aligned to the Staying Close as reflected in the Delivery Model below.



- 3.3 One accommodation support worker will be allocated to each property. There will be two main categories of supported accommodation provided:
- i. **Higher Level Support (12 young people):** Accommodation Support Worker support of up to 10 hours per week for each young person, delivered through individual and group support and overnight support for several nights per week. In addition to this young people will be able to access additional commissioned support reflecting their individual needs if this is required. Likely to be delivered in a shared house or self-contained unit with communal space for socialising and support services.
 - ii. **Medium Level Support (12 young people):** Accommodation Support Worker averaging about 5 hours per week with potential for additional commissioned support for young people reflecting their individual needs. Overnight support can be provided, when necessary, but not part of the core service. Preferred accommodation is self-contained units for each young person with additional space for communal activities and support services.
- 3.4 These services will enable the Council to move care experienced young people from high cost supported accommodation for 16–18-year-olds and residential children’s homes and into semi-independent accommodation as they transition to independent living. Wider benefits include:
- Better supportive pathways for young people as they leave care and become independent with improved long-term outcomes.
 - Increased sufficiency of 16-17 supported accommodation for children in care as 18-year-olds move on to Staying Close.
 - Reduced use of homeless accommodation for care leavers, including B&Bs.
 - Better support services for 18-year-olds who are not ready for independent living.
- 3.5 Children’s Services are working with housing providers and District Councils to identify properties that will be suitable for the Staying Close programme. This could include buildings which DCC is able to put forward from our own estate which could be supported by District Councils with expertise in property management. As soon as a suitable property is identified local elected members will be consulted.
- 3.6 Our preferred method for accessing properties would be to enter an agreement with a District Council or social landlord which will enable DCC to nominate young people to occupy the property, but where the District or provider maintains responsibility for maintenance of the property, and where tenancies are held directly between young people and the provider.
- 3.7 Partnership agreements with organisations acting as landlords for Staying Close will support the Councils values for care leavers e.g., trauma informed practice and ensuring young people are offered second chances if they are struggling. This will be supported by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Council and the accommodation provider for anything not covered by another formal contract.

- 3.8 Each Staying Close provision will work closely with supported accommodation providers and residential children's homes in their locality. Accommodation support workers will prepare young people for the move to their new home and local providers will be supported to continue with their involvement with the young people. This ensures that the young people retain important links to friends and professionals that they have lived and engaged with before moving into the Staying Close home.
- 3.9 Employment, education, and training are key components of this initiative. Young people will be supported to develop the skills they need to transition to full independence. Accommodation support workers will be trained in the Renting Ready programme in order to be able to support young people and offer advice on future housing options.
- 3.10 This model is based on a financial commitment from the Council's existing budgets of £203,000 across the 2-year pilot (see section 7).

Target Group of Young People

- 3.11 The Social Care Review found that one third of care experienced young people stated that they were not ready to leave care and live independently at the age of 18.
- 3.12 As detailed in previous sections, the Council does already have some contracts in place for young people aged 16-18, and care experienced young people aged 18+, but these do not meet the needs of all care experienced young people aged 18+.
- 3.13 Staying Close would target those young people who:
- 3.13.1 Are currently at high risk of leaving care into unsuitable accommodation due to support needs that cannot be met by the existing provision or suitable provision does not currently exist locally.
 - 3.13.2 Are already in, but also those who are likely to remain in, a placement for 6 months or longer post 18.
 - 3.13.3 Would require a relational model due to experiencing a high number of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's).
- 3.14 Children's Services already engages with Adult Services around transitions for young people who will qualify for Adult Social Care support post 18. Delivery of Staying Close will link closely with this work to ensure that there is no duplication of offer.

Staffing Implications

- 3.15 To deliver the Staying Close programme the council will need to recruit the following staff.
- 1 Team Manager
 - 9 Accommodation Support Workers (6 to be based in each home and 3 to work across the homes to cover out of hours)
- 3.16 Staff will be employed through service areas which make best use of synergies related to Staying Close such as Corporate Parenting and Countywide Services.

3.17 All posts listed are to be funded by the grant which is 100% externally funded and does not require additional financial contribution from the Council.

4) Options/Alternatives

As part of developing the proposal set out above, the following options and alternatives were considered and rejected.

4.1 Option 1: Do Nothing: Do Not Draw Down the DFE Staying Close Grant Funding

- This will not address the significant shortage of move on options for 18+ young people in Devon.
- The target cohort of care experienced people aged 18+ will continue to be accommodated in high-cost placements in supported accommodation and residential children's homes.
- The target cohort of care experienced people aged 18+ will not benefit from supported accommodation that prepares them for independent living options.
- A higher proportion of care experienced young people will likely not be in education, employment or training (NEET).
- A higher proportion of care experienced young people are likely to present as homeless and be accommodated in temporary housing.
- The Council will not be part of the national evaluation of Staying Close programme, which is a priority initiative following the Social Care Review.

4.2 Option 2: Draw down the DFE Staying Close Grant but modify the delivery model to include no financial commitment from the Council within the 2-year pilot.

- In order to achieve no financial commitment from the Council, we would need to cut funding identified in the business case for property costs (e.g., if there is a cost to the Council to lease a room for staff) and contingency costs (e.g., if young person struggles with rent or service charges and the Council needed to support them to reduce the risk of eviction). This will mean that staff will not be co-located with young people in each property and that the commitments we have made to a relational approach will be diluted. It also means that overnight staffing is not possible where young people may have high support needs or high risks. This will make it more challenging to be able to accommodate the target group of young people.
- The DfE may not agree to the Council using the grant funding in a way that changes the delivery model and is different to the successful bid. This could result in funding being withdrawn from the Council.
- This approach will offer less of a relational approach for young people supported through Staying Close, as staff will not be based in each property and therefore will not be able to build the same positive and trusting relationships set out in the bid.
- Potential increased evictions rates, due to the Council not being able to financially support young people struggling with rent or service charges. Alternatively, this could mean increased costs in other parts of Children Social Care budgets, as if we do not track this as part of the budget for Staying Close this could go through budgets under the exiting financial policy.

- Young people with high support needs will still be at high risk of living in unsuitable accommodation upon leaving care.
- It is likely that some of the target cohort of care experienced people aged 18+ will continue to be accommodated in high-cost placements in supported accommodation and residential children's homes.

4.3 **Option 3: Deliver the Staying Close Project Using Private and Voluntary Sector Providers.**

- The DfE requires the Staying Close project to be delivered over a 24-month period from Autumn 2023.
- The timescale to procure these services from an external provider may lead to significant delays in project delivery.
- There is limited capacity in the market to deliver the Staying Close model in Devon as providers are unlikely to have appropriate properties at their disposal.
- A 2-year pilot model may not be attractive to an external provider due to the risk of the project ending after 2 years.
- Accommodation Support Workers are already employed by Devon County Council and are fully embedded in the Council's Care Experienced Young People Team.
- An external provider may be less able to secure a strong multi-agency model in partnership with other providers and agencies, such as health and education.
- An external provider may find it challenging to sub-contract aspects of the project.
- Initial engagement with the market determined that an external provider would be likely to charge a rate above the DfE funding allocation, which is calculated per person per year.
- Commissioning this service would also incur opportunity costs to the Council for procurement and commissioning capacity to be able to undertake a compliant tender process.

5) Consultations Engagement

Feedback from Care Experienced Young People on Housing and Support

- 5.1 The timescale for the submission of the bid did not allow for formal consultation.
- 5.2 A workshop with care experienced people took place at the Youth Voice Event on 17th June 2023. This explored the Staying Close model and support needed for young people to thrive as they move to independent living.
- 5.3 Young people also undertook an assessment of housing issues in preparation for the event. The key quotes summarised by young people for the Housing workshop were as follows:

Planning and Transitions

- *Moving suddenly without planning or knowing where you are moving to is scary.*
- *Slower transition between homes would be better so we can adjust and can feel supported and have time to get to know the new workers while our previous workers are still involved.*

Housing and Accommodation Options

More genuinely affordable homes for young adults!.

We can get stuck in supported accommodation because there is no move-in housing'. Living in a hotel or temporary accommodation can be scary and inappropriate and you can't move on with your life

There is not enough suitable accommodation for young adults with disabilities, so we feel like we are stuck with family forever.

Decision Making and Communication

There is inconsistent decision-making on what housing is offered (Some get Band B and some do not, some get supported accommodation and some do not).

Better communication between all the different services we are accessing so that our housing officers receive the right information.

- 5.4 All of the young people priorities raised in the above list are key priorities of the Staying Close project. A further workshop is planned with care experienced young people to provide further feedback on the detailed planning and design of the project.
- 5.5 The young people that are identified to move in to Staying Close properties will be engaged in the design and planning of the accommodation and support services.
- 5.6 Providers that already work with the young people and providers within the locality of Staying Close services will be engaged in the planning for the local network of services.

Engagement with District Councils and Other Partners

- 5.7 The grant from the DfE is for revenue costs only and should not be used to cover the costs of renting or buying accommodation for Staying Close. In order to ensure suitable accommodation, we will work in partnership with District Councils, either to access accommodation which they can offer for the project, or in Districts where this is not possible to ensure that any funding and expertise available from housing towards the accommodation is utilised e.g. housing benefit, support with ensuring that Staying Close properties are linked into the housing pathway in their area in order to ensure suitable move-on.
- 5.8 Engagement with District Councils so far includes:

- An initial briefing on Staying Close at the Housing and Homes subgroup of corporate parenting board, where we discussed the objectives of the project and a wish to work in partnership with Local Housing Authorities.
 - A request has gone out to District Councils setting out our property needs for Staying Close and asking them to let us know of any properties they may be able to put forward to it. To date one District Council has come back to let us know of properties they have access to which may be suitable, another has come back to clarify requirements although they have warned us that accommodation in their District is in high demand, particularly that which would fit the requirements for Staying Close. We have also had an interest expressed from a Registered Social Landlord that works with District Councils and is able to claim housing benefit towards their accommodation.
- 5.9 If it is agreed for the DfE funding to be drawn down, then we will engage further with Districts where Staying Close accommodation is needed to set up accommodation.
- 5.10 If it is agreed for funding to be drawn down, further engagement will be undertaken with Adult Services, Public Health colleagues and key multi-agency services. This will ensure that we are making best use of support that is already available to young people.
- 5.11 We have already undertaken a market analysis to ensure that we are not duplicating any offers available through multi-agency offers.
- 5.12 The Council could not directly consult Districts when developing the bid due to time constraints and short notice from the DfE, however at the point of writing the bid the Council had recently undertaken engagement with District Councils about young people's homelessness prevention including young people transition out of care, and this intelligence was taken into account when developing the bid.

6) Strategic Plan

- 6.1 This proposal supports the Council's strategic aim to 'continue to close the attainment gap for vulnerable groups and ensure children and young people achieve the best possible outcomes.'
- 6.2 This proposal supports the A Place Called Home Strategy aim for 'all care-experienced young people to have safe, stable, affordable, and suitable places to live, which provide the foundations for independent life as adults. As corporate parents, we are responsible, alongside District Council Housing authorities, for taking steps to help all care experienced young adults to have access to safe, affordable and suitable places to live and call home'.
- 6.3 This proposal supports The Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy's key outcomes, which include:
- Safe, stable and caring places to live and call home.
 - Emotionally, physically, and mentally healthy and well
 - Trusted relationships and a strong sense of identity and belonging.
 - Making their voice heard and influencing decision-making.

- Safe and protected at home, online and in the community.
- Developing independence

6.4 Providing high quality supported accommodation placements in Devon will improve children and young people’s mental health by strengthening support for those at most risk of emotional or mental health problems.

7) Financial Considerations

7.1 The submitted budget for the Staying Close programme for 2023/24 – 2024/25 is as follows:

Area of spend	Detail	Total Cost £000
Staffing	Accommodation Support Workers	822
Commissioned Services	Spot purchase of wrap-around support service to meet the individual needs of young people, including floating support from previous care provider where beneficial	101
Commissioned Services	Housing management and maintenance costs (not including rental costs)	39
Staffing	Team Manager	110
Staffing	Project Co-ordination costs	35
Commissioned Services	Outreach services such as drop in sessions costs	40
Total		1,147

7.2 The total revenue cost, not including accommodation costs, is £1.147 million.

7.3 Accommodation costs will be dependent on the agreement set up with the provider, however based on estimates of similar contracts we would anticipate the total rental costs of properties delivering Staying Close to be £615,000. Of this amount, we would anticipate £412,000 will be recoverable from housing benefit and any contributions that young people would make towards rent and bills. This would mean an estimated amount of £203,000 which may need to be funded from existing budgets, based on 80% occupancy.

7.4 Commissioners will work with District Councils, housing associations and VCS to minimise any contribution from DCC towards maintaining young people’s tenancies.

7.5 There is some flexibility with this model as the project is developed and delivered.

7.6 The forecast saving based on 80% occupancy of 12 Staying Close places at the start of the project increasing to 24 by the end of the grant funded period, could be £2.167 million. The actual savings will be dependent on when properties are ready to be occupied and the cost of existing placements these young people move from. Costs will be closely monitored for the duration of the project to determine if this Staying Close model is sustainable in the future.

Revenue Cost	2023/24 £000	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	Total £000
Staffing*	194	496	277	967
Premises	72	264	144	480
Commissioned Services	42	155	84	281
Contingency	5	19	10	34
Total	313	933	516	1,762
Income				
DfE Grant	(221)	(595)	(331)	(1,147)
Housing Benefit	(37)	(134)	(73)	(243)
Service Charge	(9)	(33)	(18)	(60)
Rent	(16)	(60)	(33)	(109)
Total	(283)	(822)	(455)	(1,559)
Net Cost	30	112	61	203
Forecast Saving	(362)	(1,084)	(720)	(2,167)

* Inclusive of oncosts, set up costs and travel expenses

- 7.7 The average annual cost to accommodate these young people is currently £80,869, compared to £37,495 under the project model. Of the potential £2.167 million savings, £1.421 million during the project is one-off with potential ongoing annual savings of £746,000.
- 7.8 If a reduced occupancy rate of 50% is applied this would increase the Council contribution to £345,000 and reduce the potential saving to £1.354 million. To mitigate the financial impact of reduced occupancy, the recruitment of staff would be reviewed. The current proposal phases the recruitment of staff as the number of young people supported increases.
- 7.9 We will mitigate the risk of under-occupancy by ensuring that it is being considered as part of pathway planning for young people, therefore supporting good levels of occupancy.
- 7.10 At the end of the funding period the Council will need to decide if the project is sustainable. This requires a decision on the length of agreement with housing providers for use of the properties and the employment model for staff.
- 7.11 The preferred model is for staffing contracts to be permanent as this will prove more attractive to prospective employees than a fixed-term contract. This is based on the low risk of the project not being sustainable.

- 7.12 If the model were to continue beyond the grant funded period the annual cost to the Council is estimated to be £806,000, with annual savings of £1.552 million.

Capital

- 7.13 There is no capital allocation in the grant award from the DFE.
- 7.14 It is envisaged that most properties that are used for Staying Close will already be suitable for the supported accommodation. Major capital works will not be undertaken as part of this initiative.
- 7.15 Some minor capital works and repairs may be required. These will be considered on a case-by-case basis with the landlord taking into account what they would contribute to the funding.
- 7.16 Care experienced young people are eligible for a revenue contribution for furniture and equipment through the Setting Up Home Allowance. Young people will be supported to make their accommodation homely.

Staff Recruitment

- 7.17 The Staying Close project requires Accommodation Support Workers to provide the level of support required by this cohort of young people. This is based on one Accommodation Support Worker for each new property and a team of support workers to ensure out of hours and overnight support.
- 7.18 Posts required as part of the Staying Close model will be 100% externally funded and do not require additional financial contribution from Council budgets.
- 7.19 Internal recruitment of staff through redeployment will be considered as the first option. The HR Department are aware that this is a potential opportunity for staff redeployment. The redeployment list will be checked at multiple times throughout the recruitment process to check if anyone new has been added. Before any offers of employment are made, a final check will be made and staff on redeployment will take priority over anyone external.
- 7.20 There will be a requirement that any staff displaced via the Children's Reshape process will be redeployed if the roles are deemed a suitable alternative. If the role is not deemed a suitable alternative, the employee's will still be made aware of the opportunities and encouraged to apply.
- 7.21 Staff on temporary contracts within Children's Social Care whose contracts will end as they have been covering maternity, long-term sicknesses etc, will be cited of any opportunities and encouraged to apply.
- 7.22 The HR Business Partner for Children's Services will liaise closely with the HR Business Partner in Integrated Adults Social Care and other HR Business Partners to understand if there will be any staff with the right skills, who are currently not on the redeployment list, but may be placed on the redeployment list in the foreseeable future. External recruitment will cease or will be put on hold

should it be known that there will be staff from elsewhere in the Council who are likely to be at risk of redundancy. The service will consider recruiting external staff on fixed term contracts if the availability of staff with the suitable skills is likely to be available in the foreseeable future.

- 7.23 Staff will be part of a wider Children's Social Care workforce with opportunities for flexibility between roles. This includes enablement, children's homes, and other related work.
- 7.24 Recruitment of any new external staff will be based on fixed-term contracts for the lifetime of the project.

Sustainability Plan

- 7.25 Projects will target young people aged 17-19 in high cost supported accommodation and residential care who have struggled, or will struggle, to move to less intensive supported accommodation at the age of 18.
- 7.26 By supporting young people with a dedicated Accommodation Support Worker for a significant period of time before their move to Staying Close accommodation there is a much higher likelihood that they will experience a positive transition and a stable Staying Close arrangement.
- 7.27 The ongoing support of an Accommodation Support Worker and associated services within Staying Close will prepare the young person well for their move to independent living. This aims to secure improved long-term outcomes for each young person.
- 7.28 The DfE have stated an intention to make Staying Close a national entitlement for care experienced young people. They have not yet stated what funding would be available to local authorities beyond the pilot period to fund this. The Council's Staying Close sustainability plan after 2025 will in part depend on the DfE's decision to fund Staying Close, however as set out in section 7.7, this model is more financially sustainable compared to the arrangements currently in use.
- 7.29 This pilot is a test and learn and the Council is committed to regularly reviewing any financial implications as we test the delivery model. We will work closely with finance to demonstrate how the successful roll out of Staying Close will offset placement costs for care experienced young people who are unable to leave their care placement and the impact of this on both financial sustainability and quality of provision.
- 7.30 The exit plan if the Council make the decision not to continue with Staying Close would be to engage with District Councils to see if there is an appetite to re-negotiate the lease terms, so that it would be used for supported accommodation provision for the host districts. We would look to continue to support the young people through existing offers already available to young adults i.e. homelessness prevention. There could be a cost to the Council for terminating or renegotiating a lease on a property, however mitigations to this include negotiating a break clause in the agreement when it is initially agreed. As the

young people would be post 18 and will have access to public funds, such as housing benefits, The Council would not be responsible for any move-on accommodation costs. The Council may be responsible for redundancy costs for the fixed term posts. This only applies where the employee has continuous service of more than 2 years. The estimated minimum redundancy cost if all employees met this criteria would be between £28,921 - £43,385.

- 7.31 Staff could be redeployed into Children's Services vacancies or vacancies within the wider Local Authority services to help build skilled workforce and maintain the investment in the staffing within the Council. Staff could also be encouraged to apply for the SW apprenticeship programme through the social work academy.

8) Legal Considerations

- 8.1 The young people will rent their accommodation directly from the housing provider. This will enable the building owner to cover property costs and housing management.
- 8.2 If the council requires use of a self-contained unit, or equivalent, for an office and/or sleep-in facilities then the council will lease these facilities directly from the housing provider. These costs have been included in the proposed budget.
- 8.3 When an accommodation unit is vacant it is anticipated that the council will be required to cover the costs related to voids.
- 8.4 In the event that a council property is used then the council will be required to provide housing management and property costs. The council will consider charging rent and/or service charges to cover these costs.
- 8.5 There is a Staying Close budget for procured services, including housing management costs, wraparound support services, and outreach services. Where services need to be procured Children's Commissioning will seek advice from the Procurement Team to ensure that appropriate processes are followed.

9) Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change)

- 9.1 There is limited environmental impact from this initiative.
- 9.2 Accommodation Support Workers and key work staff will be predominantly based in a single building, reducing travel time.

10) Equality Considerations

- 10.1 There are no negative impacts from an equalities' perspective anticipated from the creation of Staying Close properties. There is no loss of services arising from these developments.
- 10.2 The initiative will result in improved access to supported accommodation for care experienced young people who are not yet ready to live independently. Positive impacts to follow.

- 10.3 An Equalities Impact Assessment will be completed to support the Cabinet Report.

11)Risk Management Considerations

- 11.1 A project risk register is being developed as part of this project.
- 11.2 There is a risk that properties will not be identified in line with the timescale in the project. Negotiations with District Councils, housing associations and social care providers for potential properties are underway.
- 11.3 There is a risk that staff recruitment will be challenging due to shortages of skilled staff. The council will seek to attract existing staff to the project through redeployment or secondments, and this will be followed by external recruitment.
- 11.4 The delayed announcement by the DFE of grant award which was 2 months later than indicated will impact on the timescales to spend the DFE resources allocated to the project. As a result, project delivery is now scheduled to commence in October 2023 and the initial phase of the project will end in September 2025.

12)Public Health Impact

- 12.1 Creating Staying Close accommodation will result in coordinated health and social care services which will improve public health outcomes, including in relation to their physical and mental health and well-being.
- 12.2 The project will result in a reduction in the number of young people living in inappropriate and poor-quality housing, including temporary accommodation.

13)Conclusions

- 13.1 The Staying Close initiative provides an opportunity for the Council to secure accommodation for 24 care experienced young people aged 18+ with medium to higher needs. This will enable move on from high cost supported accommodation for 16–17-year-olds and residential care homes.
- 13.2 The Staying Close service model will ensure that these young people have appropriate accommodation when leaving care where they can get emotional and practical support to improve their outcomes as they transition to independent living.
- 13.3 The project is designed to deliver significant savings to the Council as summarised in the finance section of this report.
- 13.4 The Council will be part of a national initiative to enhance support for care experienced young people who are not yet in a position to live independently.

- 13.5 The project will be subject to a detailed evaluation to determine the benefits to the young people, future destinations, and financial implications. This will determine the long-term sustainability of the initiative.

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Electoral Divisions: All

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972: LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Background Paper DFE Wave 3 Staying Close Funding Bid
Date February 2023
File Reference

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Appendix One – National Context and Support for Staying Close from the Independent Review of Childrens Social Care

The Independent Review of Childrens Social Care – Final Report.

[The-care-experience.pdf \(nationalarchives.gov.uk\)](https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/the-care-experience.pdf)

The disadvantage faced by the care experienced community should be the civil rights issue of our time. Children in care are powerless, are often invisible and they face some of the greatest inequalities that exist in England today. In spite of these injustices so many care experienced people go on to run businesses, start families, earn doctorates, produce drama, write poetry, become government ministers and contribute to the world in countless ways. Five ambitious missions are needed so that care experienced people secure: loving relationships; quality education; a decent home; fulfilling work and good health as the foundations for a good life. Central government and local authorities, employers, the NHS, schools, colleges and universities must step up to secure these foundations for all care experienced people. This will require a wider range of organisations to act as corporate parents for looked after children, and the UK should be the first country in the world to recognise the care experience as a protected characteristic.

Under Section 6 ‘The Care Experience’ the report, 5 missions are set out:

- no young person should leave care without at least two loving relationships, by 2027
- double the proportion of care leavers attending university, and particularly high tariff universities, by 2026
- create at least 3,500 new well paid jobs and apprenticeships for care leavers each year, by 2026
- reduce care experience homelessness now, before ending it entirely
- to increase the life expectancy of care experienced people, by narrowing health inequalities with the wider population

The report goes on to state, “*Whilst less well established, Staying Close has also received positive evaluations, such as the evaluation of the St Christopher’s Staying Close pilot which found improvements in relationships, education, employment and training outcomes; as well as better independent living skills and wellbeing (Heyes et al., 2020). Despite the relatively small cohort of young people currently living in Staying Close arrangements, the early outcomes should give enough confidence to local authorities and policy makers to expand its use nationally, and so that young people can access it for longer.*”

The report sets out the following recommendation:

“There should be a range of housing options open to young people transitioning out of care or who need to return, such as Staying Put, Staying Close and supported lodgings. Staying Put and Staying Close should be a legal entitlement and extended to age 23 with an ‘opt-out’ rather than ‘opt-in’ expectation.”

Appendix Two – Evaluation of the Staying Close Initiative

The benefits of the project and the financial impact will be closely evaluated over the next 2 years. This is part of the national evaluation of Staying Close which is being led by Foundations, formed through the merger of What Works for Children’s Social Care and the Early Intervention Foundation.

The national evaluation will include:

- Young people in pilot LAs vs young people in control LAs.
- Measures around housing, wellbeing and EET.
- Tracking of care leavers or future care leavers between the ages of 16-25.
- Administrative data and surveys.

Pilot local authorities will be expected to provide:

- Anonymised data on young people involved in the project.
- Feedback from young people.
- Feedback on programme implementation.

(Foundations presentation, June 2023)

In addition to the evidence-based national evaluation, Children’s Commissioning, Finance, and Children’s Management Information will closely monitor the impact of the project. This will include:

- Tracking of the views of young people before, during and beyond the project.
- Tracking the outcomes for young people before, during and beyond the project.
- Analysis of the financial impact of the programme, including costs, direct savings, and indirect savings, including cost avoidance.
- Needs analysis for the entire 16+ cohort, in light of the new Staying Close provision.
- Future options analysis to encompass Homeless Prevention contracts, supported accommodation frameworks and Staying Close.