

Croydon Council

REPORT TO:	Corporate Parenting Panel February 2018
SUBJECT:	Review of the Council's Staying Put Policy – Update
LEAD OFFICER:	Philip Segurola / Barbara Peacock
CABINET MEMBER:	Cllr Alisa Flemming
WARDS:	All
CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT/AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON:	
<p>The Ofsted Inspection of services for children in need of help of protection, children looked after and care leavers, which took place in June and July of 2017 said the following in relation to Staying Put for Care Leavers:</p> <p><i>Not enough children and young people are staying with their carers after they are 18 years of age.</i></p> <p><i>Not enough care leavers benefit from staying - put arrangements. A much lower proportion of Croydon care leavers benefit from living with their former foster carers beyond the age of 18 years than in neighbouring authorities or nationally. Some care leavers and foster carers reported that they believed that staying - put arrangements are only available until the age of 18 if they remain in full - time education. In addition, care plans often say that children will remain in placement until 18 years of age. Both of these factors undermine efforts to ensure that more care leavers benefit from the security and stability of continuing to live with their foster carers as they transition to independent adulthood.</i></p> <p>The Inspectorate made the following recommendation:</p> <p>Ensure that staying - put arrangements are promoted to all care leavers and foster carers, so that care leavers who want to stay with their former foster carers can benefit from greater permanency and support as they move towards independent adulthood.</p> <p>Additionally, it is noted that a young person who is a regular attendee at the Corporate Parenting Panel also noted that he felt from personal experience and that of some others known to him, that the Council's Staying Put policy is not well understood among young people and foster carers.</p>	
FINANCIAL IMPACT	
For future consideration.	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Panel note the update on the review of the Staying Put arrangements, including implementation plan and timeframes.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The January 2018 report to the Board outlined the legislative duties around the 'Staying Put' graduated approach to planning transition to adulthood. The intention is to ensure young people can remain with their former foster carers until they are prepared for adulthood, can experience a transition akin to their peers, avoid social exclusion and be more likely to avert a subsequent housing and tenancy breakdown. The report outlined current take-up in Croydon (98 arrangements since 2014) and the financial grant provided for Staying Put arrangements (£529,837 in 2017-18).
- 2.2 A Staying Put Arrangement applies to a young person who was looked after immediately prior to their eighteenth birthday as an eligible child; (an eligible child is someone who is aged 16 or 17 and has been looked after for a total of at least 13 weeks since the age of 14). The young person's Social Worker will be responsible for the process from the age of 16 years until the young person's 18th birthday when the Staying Put arrangement starts. After this time the Leaving Care Personal Adviser will take over the support of the care leaver and maintenance of the arrangement.
- 2.3 A review of the Council's Staying Put policy and arrangements has commenced and this report provides an update on the implementation plan in place and further details of timeframes.

3. Objectives of Staying Put Review

- 3.1 The objectives of the Staying Put Review are:
- Engagement exercise on current views and suggestions for improvement on Staying Put arrangements, particularly in respect of the advantages and barriers to putting these in place:
 - Service Users – children and young people
 - Foster carers
 - Social workers
 - IFA framework providers
 - Review the financial cost of Staying Put arrangements to the service user, foster carer and Council and undertake cost-benefit analysis of potential changes
 - Review the Staying Put policy and propose options for potential changes
 - Seek the views of service users, foster carers, IFA and social workers on proposed changes

- Increase awareness and publicity around revised Staying Put arrangements
- Increase the take-up of Staying Put arrangements

3.2 The **key actions and timeframes** of the Staying Put Review are:

Action	Timeframe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Engagement with Service users, foster carer, IFA, social workers on current Staying Put arrangements 	March 2018
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Financial baseline of Staying Put arrangement costs ▪ Cost Benefit analysis of increasing Staying Put arrangements ▪ Modelling of alternative financial options 	March 2018
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Devise potential changes to Staying Put arrangements, approach and financial rates 	April 2018
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consult with Service users, foster carer, IFA, social workers on potential changes 	May 2018
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Final proposals/options paper produced 	June 2018
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Final proposals/options paper review & decision-making at Corporate Parenting Board 	July 2018
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Launch date of updated Staying Put policy and arrangements; publicity, awareness raising 	Late July 2018

4. Challenges

4.1 Anecdotally we know that the vast majority of instances where arrangement are not processed are due to the foster carer not wanting to have a reduced income. A question is included in the Foster Carer survey to ascertain more feedback on what are the barriers preventing foster carers progressing with Staying Put arrangements.

Very occasionally, we have foster carers who would not want to lose their status as foster carer and case evidence suggests this is more likely to happen when the carer is registered with an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA).

We do know that some IFAs would not want to 'lose' their foster carer, albeit temporarily. This includes that the IFA would lose their premium for that placement. To address this and encourage compliance, we have inserted a clause into the contract with our preferred 'framework' providers. This also affords clarity in our expectation about preparation for young people to leave care.

- 4.2 There is a sense that a significant number of our Care Leavers would prefer to live independently, which may be related to the high number of UASC. This will need to be explored further through engagement with Care Leavers.
- 4.3 According to the Children and Social Work Act 2017, Local Authorities will be required to offer a service to all Care Leavers up to their 25th birthday. Guidance is not yet available and therefore it is not clear what impact this might have on the Staying Put policy and budget.
- 4.4 The Local Authority has to date not kept records of occasions when a Staying Put arrangement has been explored but not agreed, though we know that none have been turned down once the process is activated. A process of recording will need to be implemented to track efforts to progress Staying Put arrangements and the reasons if these are not successful.

5. Potential changes to Staying Put arrangements

- 5.1 There are a number of options being explored and these will require full financial analysis and engagement activities. These include:
- increase the rent element rate from £520.00 per month to £747.37, knowing that this can be claimed from Universal Credit or Housing Benefit. The Council does have the discretion to set Staying Put rates, within budget
 - increase in Staying Put rates for young people in full time education given that the rate only increases during the second year. This was set as is with the intention of encouraging young people to stay on but the link is arguably difficult for carers and young people to make
 - increase rate and wider criteria for young people with a disability in order to support a longer run in to adulthood and independence
 - explore options for Staying Put and Universal Credit claims for young people who are Leaving the Care of 'Connected Person' carers to establish whether there is any flexibility in the DWP's position

8 CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Though the local authority are not legally required to consult on this matter it is good practice to engage with stakeholders. The review of Staying Put arrangements will involve full consultation with staff, foster carers and young people. Additionally, there is value in being clear about the expectations upon Local Authorities in regard to young people aged 21 and up to their 25th birthday.
- 8.2 It will be useful to relaunch the policy as part of a set of activities to develop a wider publicised offer to Croydon's Care Leavers. This will include a re-launch

of the policy to ensure it is well understood by carers, providers and staff.

9. FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

9.1 A full cost benefit analysis would be useful in order to establish what is affordable within current budget and where it is possible to divert funds from private rented sector rent currently paid for some young people.

10. COMMENTS OF THE COUNCIL SOLICITOR AND MONITORING OFFICER

N/ A at this time but a discussion and view will be necessary in reviewing the policy.

11. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

N/A

12. EQUALITIES IMPACT

Will need to be considered to ensure that Care leavers are treated in a way that is clearly understood and given that young people's entitlements to public funds can differ depending on their circumstances.

13. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

N/A

14. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

N/A

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