

# Evaluation of the Staying Put: 18+ Family Placement Pilot Programme Interim Report

## Overview of Emerging Themes and Issues

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This research report was written before the new UK Government took office on 11 May 2010. As a result the content may not reflect current Government policy and may make reference to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which has now been replaced by the Department for Education (DFE).

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Background**

The Staying Put pilot, which began in 11 local authorities in July 2008, is targeted at young people who have established relationships with foster carers and offers this group the opportunity to remain with their carers until they reach the age of 21. The key objectives of the pilot are to:

- Enable young people to build on and nurture their attachments to their foster carers, so that they can move to independence at their own pace and be supported to make the transition to adulthood in a more gradual way just like other young people who can rely on their own families for this support;
- Provide the stability and support necessary for young people to achieve in education, training and employment; and
- Give weight to young people's views about the timing of moves to greater independence from their final care placement.

The interim report presents findings from a mapping exercise and face-to-face interviews conducted between December 2009 and April 2010 with managers responsible for implementing Staying Put in each of the 11 pilot authorities, to explore:

- How authorities are actually implementing Staying Put (and any changes compared to plans submitted to the former Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF); and
- Challenges and issues that they are facing in implementing Staying Put in practice.

### **Key findings from the Interim Report**

#### *Pre-existing practice*

- Prior to the implementation of Staying Put all of the pilot authorities had already begun to allow some young people to remain with their carers post- 18 years. Decisions tended to be taken on an ad-hoc basis and predominately for young people remaining in education.
- Three local authorities also offered placement extensions for young people with disabilities.

#### *Staying Put models of delivery*

- There are variations in perspectives about which young people could or should be eligible to remain with carers up to the age of 21. In the majority of local authorities 'established' relationships<sup>1</sup> with carers were a pre-condition for remaining in placement post- 18.
- Most pilot authorities have adopted a '*pure familial*' model for Staying Put whereby young people *remain with their former foster carer*, with whom they have an *established relationship*, post-18. This model attempts to closely replicate the experiences of young people in the general population and adheres closely to the original tender specification issued by DCSF.
- A '*hybrid*' model has been adopted by three authorities. This maximises the opportunity that young people can Stay Put by removing the pre-condition that young people have to have an established relationship with the carer prior to the age of 18 to be eligible to Stay Put.

#### *Conditions of eligibility*

- Staying Put aims to provide 'the stability and support necessary for young people to achieve in education, training and employment'.
- Engagement in education, employment and training (EET) is a pre-requisite for inclusion in Staying Put in some authorities. However, in others less strict criteria have been applied. Staying Put may offer an opportunity to encourage young people who were not engaged to re-engage in EET.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Established' and 'familial' relationships were not explicitly defined during interview

- Some interviewees expressed concern that requiring people to be engaged in EET could potentially exclude some of the most vulnerable young people from ongoing placements with foster carers, thereby denying them further support to meet their needs and promote positive outcomes.

#### *Replicating normative transitions*

- Early indications suggest that many young people are Staying Put for relatively short periods. Removing the requirement that young people must leave placements at 18 means young people are more in control of the process.
- Professionals perceived that offering young people greater choice and flexibility about when they leave, rather than requiring them to move at an externally imposed and predefined time (related to age rather than circumstance) was beneficial for them.
- A number of authorities try to afford young people the right to return to care placements if the transition to independence raises unforeseen challenges or young people's plans or circumstances change. While young people may be able to return (albeit within varying timescales and depending on local authority policies) it may not be possible for young people to return to their former carers. Similar issues have been identified in the evaluation of Right2BCared4 (Munro et al., 2010).

#### *Renegotiating expectations post 18*

- Young people may continue to experience difficulties when they leave care, irrespective of age, if they have not received sufficient preparation and therefore have to suddenly adjust to instant adulthood.
- Local authorities indicated that foster carers may still struggle with how best to support young people to prepare for independent living. They identified that preparation for independence should begin earlier and that foster carers needed specialist support and training to facilitate this. Some pilot sites are developing specialist provision through the pilot (see also Munro et al., 2010).

### *Taxation and benefits issues*

One of the aims of the Staying Put pilots was to explore how insurance, tax and benefit issues and other barriers to implementation could be resolved.

### *Taxation issues*

- Subject to Parliamentary approval of the Finance Bill, a new tax relief scheme, Shared Lives, will be applied retrospectively from 6 April 2010. This has the potential to clarify and simplify tax relief arrangements for Staying Put carers.
- However, it is unclear what criteria HM Revenue and Customs will use to assess what constitutes a Staying Put placement for the purposes of tax relief. The evaluation so far has shown that Staying Put pilots have adopted different positions on what constitutes a Staying Put placement. It is possible that some placements currently offered may fall outside the HMRC definition.

### *Benefits issues*

- Young adults in Staying Put placements attending higher education and university are not usually entitled to benefits but have access to a range of other financial support. Other young adults who wish to access basic or 'second chance' learning are currently subject to *time-limited* access to benefits which may serve as a disincentive.
- Decisions concerning whether young adults who Stay Put are entitled to housing benefit have varied between pilot sites. Entitlement to housing benefit has presented major challenges for some pilot sites whilst others have had no difficulties in accessing local housing allowances.
- There were different perspectives concerning whether or not care leavers should be expected to claim benefits, regardless of their entitlement.

### *Financial arrangements for carers and young people*

- Pilot authorities have adopted a range of payment models for Staying Put carers ranging from a continuation of the previous fostering arrangement pre-18 to a completely new fee structure.
- While some carers continue on the same or similar remuneration packages, other carers within Staying Put now receive less financial reward for offering a Staying Put placement.
- Most pilot authorities agree with the principle that young people should contribute to their placements although the protocols for doing so are not necessarily agreed and in place.
- In order to access other benefits to “top-up” Staying Put placements, interviews revealed that young adults and their carers might have to establish a formal business or contractual relationship such as “landlord” and “excluded licensee”.

### **Next steps**

The next phase of the study will involve the collection of management information system (MIS) data on two cohorts of young people. This will facilitate analysis of similarities and differences in outcomes for young people who have Stayed Put compared to those who chose not to remain with their foster carers beyond 18 and those who did not have the option to do so (pre-pilot cohort).

In-depth work will also be undertaken in six of the pilot sites using a mixed methods approach. Former care leavers, trained as peer researchers, will interview young people to explore the views and experiences of those who Stayed Put, those who opted to move to independence and those whose foster carers felt unable to maintain placements for them once they reached 18. The perspectives of their personal advisors and foster carers will also be sought. A bottom up costing methodology (Beecham, 2000) will be employed to examine the costs of the pilot compared to standard provision and set these against outcomes. The costs of rolling out the programme will also be explored.



## **Background**

Care Matters: Time for Change proposed piloting arrangements to provide young people 'who have an *established familial relationship* with their foster carers the opportunity to continue to stay with them up to the age of 21' (Department for Education and Skills, 2007, p.110, emphasis added). The Department for Children, Schools and Families, in their specification to local authorities outlined that the main aims of the pilot are to:

- enable young people to build on and nurture their attachments to their carers, so that they can move to independence at their own pace and be supported to make the transition to adulthood in a more gradual way just like other young people who can rely on their own families for this support;
- provide the stability and support necessary for young people to achieve in education, training and employment; and
- give weight to young people's views about the timing of moves to greater independence from their final care placement.

The Staying Put: 18 + Family Placement Pilot Programme (Staying Put) is one of a series of measures that has the potential to promote transitions from care to adulthood that are more akin to those experienced by young people in the general population. Emphasis is placed upon relationships and attachments rather than interventions and services. It is noteworthy that the pilot was targeted at young people in foster care, although there was a recognition in *Care Matters* that it may be appropriate to provide this opportunity for some young people in residential care (Department for Education and Skills, 2007).

## **Introduction and Scope of the Report**

The Centre for Child and Family Research, Loughborough University, in collaboration with the National Care Advisory Service (NCAS) has been commissioned to evaluate the extent to which Staying Put meets the aims above (p.7) and helps care leavers achieve better outcomes. The study will also ascertain the costs and benefits of the pilot compared to standard leaving

care provision and that offered under Right2BCared 4<sup>2</sup> (see Annex A for further details and Munro et al., 2010 for interim findings from the Right2BCared4 evaluation).

This interim report provides a brief overview of themes and issues emerging from analysis of data from the first phase of the evaluation. Findings are derived from a mapping exercise to explore similarities and differences in 11 pilot authorities' delivery plans (based on their original application to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)) and in-depth face-to-face interviews with the managers responsible for implementing Staying Put in each of the 11 pilot authorities ('Staying Put leads')<sup>3</sup> to explore:

- how authorities are actually implementing Staying Put (and any changes compared to the plans submitted to DCSF)
- challenges and issues that they are facing in implementing Staying Put in practice.

The data, collected between December 2009 and April 2010, provide a preliminary insight into how Staying Put is being operationalised in practice. However, it is important to note that implementation is an iterative process and changes both nationally and locally are likely to influence service development. Later stages of the evaluation will facilitate triangulation of the findings and more in-depth examination of the issues raised and the impact of the pilot on outcomes for care leavers. Further details concerning subsequent phases of the evaluation and the methodology are outlined in Annex A and B.

### **Pre-existing policy and practice prior to implementation of Staying Put**

The mapping exercise offers an insight into local authority leaving care policy and practice *prior* to implementation of Staying Put. Key findings are presented in Table 1, below. Documentary analysis revealed that many

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<sup>2</sup> Right2BCared4 is based on the principle that young people aged 16-18 should not be expected to leave care until they reach the age of 18; that they should be properly prepared before they move to independent living arrangements and that they should have a greater say in the decision-making process preceding their exit from care

<sup>3</sup> An additional interview was conducted with a manager from a local authority that have implemented 'Staying Put' but who are not engaged in the formal pilot.

authorities had already begun to allow some young people to remain with their carers post 18. However, decisions concerning whether or not young people could stay tended to be made on a case-by-case basis and were often orientated toward those young people who were still in education. Three authorities also stated in their applications to the DCSF that extended placement options were available to young people with disabilities.

**Table 1: Mapping of pre-existing post 18 placement provision**

Pilot site	Scope to remain up to the end of Year 13	Scope to remain up to remain after the end of Year 13 and up to the start of University	'Conversion' to Supported lodgings with existing carer
A	√		√
B			
D	√	√	√
K			√
L	√	√	√
M	√		√
N	√		√
P	√		
Q			√
R	√	√	√

Note: the table is based on the information supplied in applications to DCSF. It is *possible* that other pilot sites were offering the provisions outlined but did not include details in their bids.

### **Defining Staying Put 18+ in practice: messages from the pilot sites**

The mapping exercise and interviews with managers revealed considerable variation in how pilots had interpreted which young people could or should be eligible to remain with their carers up to 21. Analysis revealed that authorities had different perspectives upon whether or not 'established' relationships with carers were a pre-condition for remaining in placement post 18. Authorities

were classified by the research team into two categories according to their position in this respect, as outlined in Table 2.

**Table 2: Authority interpretations of whether established relationships with foster carers are a pre-condition for Staying Put**

Local Authority	'Pure' familial model	Hybrid model
A	√	
B	√	
D		√
K		√
L		√
M	√	
N	√	
P	√	
Q	√	
R	√	
S	√	

*Emerging characteristics of the 'pure familial model'*

At one end of the continuum, eight authorities were operating a 'pure familial' model in which young people were able to remain with *their former foster carer*, with whom they had an *established relationship*<sup>4</sup>:

*We looked at Staying Put in its purest sense. So it wasn't going to look at offshoots [for example] supported lodgings schemes or anything else...We created an ethos for our group, which was that Staying Put is about remaining within the family.*

This authority also took the position that the young people within Staying Put should be given the same or similar opportunities as those given to other young people by their families:

<sup>4</sup> 'Established' and 'familial' relationships were not explicitly defined during the interviews

*Staying Put is about remaining with the family or within the family...We have one foster carer in Staying Put and her own son is slightly older...Her son went off to college and he came back. He went off to live with mates. It failed, he came back....Staying Put has allowed [her foster son] a lot of these opportunities...We just want this to be a family thing.*

This model attempts to closely replicate the experiences of young people in the general population and adheres closely to the original tender specification issued by DCSF. However, it *may* exclude certain young people from benefitting from extended placements post 18. Young people in residential care or who have experienced relatively recent or multiple placement changes or breakdowns are not eligible to Stay Put if these strict criteria are applied. However, it is important to understand that the needs of those young people who are not eligible for Staying Put may be met in other ways by the authorities in question and therefore the pilot needs to be seen in the wider context of leaving care provision.

#### *Emerging characteristics of the 'hybrid model'*

At the other end of the continuum, three authorities have sought to maximise the opportunity that young people can stay, operating a wider definition ('hybrid model') of Staying Put that removes the pre-requisite that young people must have an established relationship with their carer prior to 18. Interviewees identified that young people who were not assessed as having 'familial' or 'established' relationships with their carers were often those in greatest need of ongoing support.

*Historically...we did support those in full-time education or fulltime higher education...I think this [the pilot] in a sense gave us permission to include those who, you know probably have higher needs.*

These local authorities indicated that maintaining existing foster placements and relationships was desirable where possible, but that flexibility was required because it is not always in a young person's best interests to remain

with their long term foster carer, even if the relationship was established (see also, Ward et al., 2008). Further, young people should not be penalised if placements breakdown. Flexible, young person centred, need led responses were emphasised. For example, the manager in one of the pilot sites explained that they had a case in which a young man had been in a long term placement with foster carers but that relationships had become strained. Finding another Staying Put placement was seen as a solution in order to preserve longstanding relationships rather than jeopardising these. In another local authority a manager suggested:

*Staying Put [with current] carers is obviously the number one priority...But in my head it's in two bits, it's Staying Put with your carer if possible, but if not then staying within another protective environment which is usually Supported Lodgings (emphasis added).*

Another manager explained the rationale of extending post-18 family placement beyond a pre-existing foster care placement as *the continuing care of that young person rather than the continuing care by the [same] carer.*

One authority planned to include five young adults who were approaching 18 years and in residential care settings within their Staying Put pilot. It had been agreed as part of the pathway planning process that these young adults would benefit from being placed with a family post-18. This was in contrast to five other young adults within the same authority whose plans included transfer from supported accommodation to supported lodgings post-18.

These categorisations will be tested and refined further during the course of the evaluation. Consideration will also be given to the impact that different conditions of eligibility may have upon young people's experiences and outcomes, as well as the impact that decisions may have upon carers.

### ***Additional conditions of eligibility***

#### *Education, training or employment as a condition of Staying Put*

One of the aims of Staying Put was identified as 'providing the stability and

support necessary for young people to achieve in education, training and employment'. Authorities had interpreted this in different ways. Some local authorities were clear that they expected young people to be in education, employment or training (EET) to secure access to ongoing support and provision under the Staying Put pilot.

*If somebody's going to stay put, they've got to be basically employed or in education, training or a position to move into it...if young people are not engaged, just staying in bed all day...[you're]...spending a lot of money for nothing.*

*The criteria is fairly strict in the sense that they need to be in education, training or employment. We're looking at those achievers rather than those non-achievers ...[although] we need to be flexible in the current economic climate.*

An alternative position, outlined in some of the other interviews was that expecting young people to be in EET would potentially exclude some of the most vulnerable young people from ongoing placements with foster carers, thereby denying them further support to meet their needs and promote positive outcomes in the longer term.

*Another ambition of mine is not to base everything on a child's education status, because the After Care legislation was basically about keeping young people that are in education. My belief is that some of the young people that are out of education or any employment are in fact the most vulnerable and I want to do what I can to redress that balance.*

Indeed, young people with evidence of additional support needs (including, for example, those with emotional and behavioural difficulties and offending behaviour) often experience multiple placement changes, are less likely to complete schooling or access specialist provision to meet their needs (Ward et al., 2008). A vicious circle can occur whereby they are alienated from efforts to provide effective support (Holmes and Ward, 2006). Strict eligibility

criteria mean that the availability of extended care may vary inversely with the needs of the leaving care population (the Inverse Care Law: Hart, 1971).

The authorities adopting an alternative position recognised that young adults joining the Staying Put scheme would do so from very different starting points. They either placed no requirement to be engaged in education, employment and training in order to be included in the Staying Put pilot scheme or had a flexible system whereby young people had a time-limited period in which to engage in these or other 'meaningful' activities. One manager explained that in this way Staying Put could facilitate or create a new opportunity or fresh start for young people by reframing expectations of them to be higher whilst recognising that this might take some time to achieve:

*...setting the bar high rather than low has actually helped some young people motivate themselves to become engaged in education, training, employment.*

In contrast, one authority indicated that it was still very challenging to encourage young adults within Staying Put to become motivated and engage in these activities:

*I think we underestimate just how slowly progress can be and I think that this is where the Staying Put thing, I think, needs to probably recognise that we have to try and move at the young person's pace.*

Some authorities have also had to adopt a more flexible approach owing to the current economic climate which had made it more challenging for young adults to secure employment and had resulted in redundancy for others.

*And there have been young people who've been made redundant ... and we've had to appreciate that those young people can't necessarily immediately transfer from being made redundant to getting on a training scheme because it might not synchronise... .*



## **Seeking to replicate normative transitions**

*The role and contribution of Staying Put in supporting young people and improving outcomes*

Although there are variations in pilot local authorities' criteria for Staying Put, there is scope for some young people to continue to live with their carers up until the age of 21. During the course of the interviews it became evident that many young people were staying put for much shorter periods. However, offering young people greater choice and flexibility about when they leave, rather than requiring them to move at an externally imposed and predefined time (related to age rather than circumstance) was perceived by professionals to be beneficial for them (see also Munro et al., 2010). A manager reflected that, in his experience, in the past, young people had caused a placement breakdown shortly before they reached 18 because they knew that their discharge from care...

*was looming and it was going to be done to them...And so they wanted to do it first and be in control of it...What we're hoping will happen [under Staying Put] is that these breakdowns won't occur because there's no formal end date frightening them...the young person can leave naturally and move on to something sustainable and positive.*

Another manager recounted that she had asked young people whether they believed Staying Put had helped better prepare them for independence and that:

*all of them without exception said yes...even if they'd only been there a very short time....Maybe those extra few weeks to think about where they want to go and settle the next step if you like.*

Another interviewee indicated that:

*A lot of our Staying Put young people don't actually stay put for that long...it might be anything from three months to a year...So they seem to be using it to sort of manage a transition rather than to avoid transition.*

Subsequent phases of data collection, including interviews with young people, will facilitate further exploration of this. The duration of time young people Stay Put also has cost and capacity implications: if young people are staying for relatively short periods post 18, as opposed to remaining with their carers until 21, this will reduce both the financial burden on authorities of extended placements and the corresponding pressures on the foster care system (See p.20-22 for further discussion).

### ***Renegotiating expectations post 18***

#### *Preparation*

Interviews with professionals involved in the R2BCared4 and the Staying Put pilots raised concerns that extended entitlements do not necessarily resolve the problems that young people can encounter in making the transition from care to independence. As one interviewee suggested, there is a danger that we're just moving an artificial barrier from 18 to 21 unless young people are properly prepared (see also, Munro et al., 2010). In one local authority young people emphasised the importance '*of work around the emotional aspect of moving on and leaving care*'. Young people may continue to experience difficulties when they leave care, irrespective of age, if they have not received sufficient preparation and therefore have to suddenly adjust to instant adulthood. That is, they may experience extended and abrupt transitions to adulthood (Stein and Munro, 2008). Interviews with Staying Put leads identified recognition of the importance that young people are adequately prepared for independent living, but acknowledged that some carers struggle to facilitate this.

*The altruistic nature of carers [means] they tend to overcompensate...from my experience of meeting up with young people they are not prepared for independence because their foster carers are doing everything for them.*

*Young people should be given an amount of money to manage by their foster carers and you know some foster carers are well intentioned but very paternal or maternalistic whichever way you want to look at it in the sense of you know going out and buying a 16-year-old boy his underpants.*

One explanation for this was that:

*Carers take their responsibility as a carer seriously...I think if you're a paid foster carer there are certain rules in place, like checking where [young people] are staying and things like that, that perhaps aren't expected in a birth relationship.*

Another manager reflected that:

*Some of these foster households are actually quite busy places... and need somewhat more in terms of planning... In these environments it is easy to be more protective and not to be having young Tommy...flooding the kitchen. But actually I'm interested that increasingly young people stay at home longer...and I think actually parents are far more protective than they have been before, and so actually carers, if they are overprotective, are actually reflecting what we're asking them to reflect.*

An interviewee from another authority identified that in the past authorities have not necessarily started training and preparing carers early enough for their role in equipping young people with independent living skills (see also, Munro et al., 2010). It was also identified that authorities have not always been sufficiently clear about their expectations of carers.

#### *Foster carer training and changing expectations*

The mapping exercise found a range of plans to develop training for foster carers involved in Staying Put. These included:

- Recruiting an additional Fostering Support Worker;
- Recruitment of additional staff to develop and deliver training

specifically on the needs of young people making the transition from care to adulthood; and

- Commissioning external training and consultancy (for example, from NCAS or the Fostering Network).

In the majority of interviews it was acknowledged that preparation for independence should start early, that foster carers do need training and support to ensure young people have the opportunity to grow and mature and take on more responsibility and that relationships and expectations need to be re-negotiated post 18. Such re-negotiations also take place within birth families, but they are not accompanied by changes in income and contractual arrangements in the same way (see p.26-28). In the general population the terminology used to describe relationships remains constant, while in some of the Staying Put pilot sites young people become excluded licensees and their foster carers become their landlords once they reach legal adulthood.

*... they have struggled with the concept of no longer being foster carers but being providers and landlords but obviously ... it's enabled them to continue to care for the young person because we wouldn't be able to afford it otherwise... it's a paper exercise fundamentally.*

*You're a landlord, they're a licensee...you've both got rights and responsibilities...by asking young people to sign a license agreement you've started to take them into the adult world of responsibility.*

However, an alternative perspective was that the terminology employed (excluded licensees and landlords) has negative connotations and is at odds with a desire to embrace and support familial relationships:

*Changing them to Supported Lodgings does not respect what they've done previously...I think it's just so disrespectful...we call our carers Post-18 Foster Carers.*

Authorities also have different perspectives upon the extent to which reaching

legal adulthood should instigate a review of foster carer and young people's respective roles and responsibilities:

*It's a continuation of a relationship but it's a different phase...I think some carers have struggled with that. Where we've drawn up the license agreement I always promote that as a good opportunity to revisit the rules and maybe make adjustments and recognise that the young person is older now and may want to change some things. Some carers have really struggled with that.*

Young people's and foster carers' experiences of the pilot will be explored in the next phase of the evaluation. This will help illuminate the effectiveness of different approaches to supporting transitions to adulthood that are more akin to those experienced by young people in the general population. Another mechanism to promote this is opening up opportunities for young people to return to care if they need to do so.

#### *Right to return*

Local authorities had implemented systems to enable young people in higher education to return to their former carers during the holidays. Retainer payments were often made to facilitate this (see below). The right to return had also been extended to young people who were not in higher education in a small number of the pilot areas. As one interviewee reflected, those young people with the most complex needs, who, arguably would benefit most from the opportunity to remain with foster carers or in Supported Lodgings beyond 18 were often disinclined to stay. Offering the right for young people to return to placements, having experienced the realities of living independently was seen as a means of facilitating their re-engagement with the local authority. It was also acknowledged that young people in the general population often return to the family home having left for a period; as such offering the right to return was perceived to model the choices that young people in the general population often have available to them. During the course of the interviews a number of authorities revealed that they tried to afford young people the right to return if the transition to independence raised unforeseen challenges or

young people's plans or circumstances changed (see also, Munro et al., 2010). It was not always clear whether this right was attributable to implementation of Staying Put or was pre-existing practice.

*The revolving door is really important... [young people] might need a little Supported Accommodation and then decide they need to be with a family.*

However, as one manager reflected '*in reality, there's always somebody behind you in the queue to jump into your place*' and as such, while young people may be able to return to care (albeit within varying timescales depending upon local authority policies) it may not be possible for young people to return to live with their previous carers (see also, Munro et al., 2010).

It was noteworthy that at least three authorities had introduced a policy whereby placements were kept open while young people undertook basic military training.

*We'd got this lad who left to go into the RAF, did all this training, and then decided the week before that he didn't want to go for it. And he was able to go back to his placement...It was part of the planning that we always said we would keep, especially somebody who was on army training. When they sign up, if they pass through and when they sign up say for three years then we'll fill the bed but until that point there's always a chance to return.*

The time limited nature of the basic training meant that authorities did not have to leave placements open indefinitely, which was welcomed, particularly in the context of recruitment and retention difficulties within fostering.

### **Recruitment and retention**

Concerns have been raised that extending entitlements for young people to remain in foster care up to the age of 21 places additional pressure on Fostering Services and contributes to the existing problem of a shortage of

foster carers and lack of placement choice. However, interviews identified that the impact of Staying Put on this wider issue should not be overstated, in so far as many young people who are Staying Put are choosing to do so for relatively short periods. Furthermore, not all their current carers would continue to provide placements.

*If you've got a Staying Put carer who's going to carry on being a foster carer, then when the Staying Put care leaver moves out the fostering team are going to put someone else there and that's a very practical issue. In other cases, some Staying Put carers would look after that young person for the duration and when that young person moved on they won't foster again.*

*I don't think we've separated out enough yet as to what the implications of Staying Put will be...whether they are now either fostering one less child or whether they had additional space....*

Such issues will be explored further during the course of the evaluation. The mapping exercise did reveal that local authorities had still adopted, or were planning to adopt, a number of strategies to increase the recruitment and retention of foster carers. These included:

- Funding posts to support assessment of new potential foster carers;
- Strengthening the financial package paid to Staying Put carers to match remuneration levels prior to young people turning 18;
- Funding to allow existing carers to expand their foster capacity where physical space in the home was an issue, for example funding a loft conversion; and
- Foster carer recruitment campaigns and marketing.

In a small number of local authorities emphasis was being placed upon the recruitment of carers for older children (14 years plus) who would be willing to continue to care for young people beyond the age of 18.

*We've been talking to potential carers, we have been saying this is for the long journey, not necessarily up to 21, but it doesn't necessarily come to a shuddering halt at 18...We are trying to build that expectation now.*

Addressing the shortage of foster carers takes time and some of the pilot sites identified that they were heavily reliant on independent providers. Maintaining young people in such placements, post-18, at the same level of remuneration can be costly to the local authorities involved. One local authority had renegotiated payment rates with independent providers prior to the start of the Staying Put pilot.

*...we selected [a number of] independent fostering providers to be our first choice in terms of where we want to place children in foster placements. And we included in that agreement a clause around an agency not obstructing on the grounds of commerciality, any arrangements where a foster care and a young person wants to stay put and that has helped us over some of the hurdles that other pilot authorities have encountered with the independent sector.*

Elsewhere, an independent foster carer was initially keen to continue to care for two boys, both of whom were approaching 18. However, this carer changed her position when the financial implications became clear:

*... she was in receipt of £450 per week for each young person, so that's £900 a week and we're saying well we'll give them £250 less benefits ... that was financial, that's what happens with the IFAs in this profoundly difficult financial scenario...there is no easy answer for it.*

## **Taxation and benefits issues**

*Taxation status of carers or providers offering Staying Put placements*

One of the aims of the Staying Put pilots was to explore ways in which insurance, tax and benefit issues and other barriers to implementation of the pilot could be resolved. Most pilot authorities reported some difficulties and



challenges in resolving such issues, particularly in relation to status changes associated with young people reaching 18 years of age. The majority of pilot sites indicated that foster carers had anxieties about the potential change in their status signalled by young people reaching legal adulthood and how this might impact upon their income if the placement continued post-18.

Those offering foster placements for under 18s and adult placement carers are generally treated as being self-employed for taxation purposes. Income and profits from such care are usually exempt from Income Tax (HM Customs and Revenue, Foster and adult placement carers, HS236, Tax year 6 April 2008 to 5 April 2009, <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/helpsheets/hs236.pdf>, accessed 12.03.10).

In the pre-Budget Report 2009 to parliament, the government announced improvements to the tax arrangements for carers looking after vulnerable individuals under a qualifying Shared Lives scheme. Subject to Parliamentary approval of the Finance Bill, these tax relief arrangements will be applied retrospectively from 6 April 2010 and will be available to carers who:

- provide accommodation, care and support for up to three individuals who have been placed with them under a local authority Shared Lives placement scheme and
- share their home and family life with the individuals placed with them under the Shared Lives scheme.

Shared Lives carers will include adult placement carers and Staying Put carers (HM Customs and Revenue, PBRN22, 9 December 2009, <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/pbr2009/pbrn22.pdf>, accessed 15.03.10 ).

This new and simplified tax relief will replace the current arrangements for adult placement carers and will be very similar to the current Foster Care relief described above.

The Shared Lives scheme has the potential to clarify the position of carers offering Staying Put placements. However, at this stage it remains unclear what criteria HM Revenue and Customs will use to assess whether a

placement constitutes a Staying Put placement under Shared Lives. As the discussion above (p.9) reveals pilot sites have adopted different positions regarding what constitutes a Staying Put placement and who is entitled to this provision. Therefore, it is possible that certain types of placements currently operating within some of the Staying pilot schemes will not meet HM Revenue and Customs definitions. This will be explored further in the course of the evaluation.

### *Welfare Benefits*

Local authorities have experienced great difficulties in establishing entitlements to welfare benefits for Staying Put carers and in particular for the young people that they support. Since the implementation of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, the financial responsibilities of local authorities towards those leaving care have changed. Young people leaving care aged 16-17 are no longer within the benefits system but covered by a duty on local authorities to provide financial support for accommodation and living expenses. In the Staying Put pilots where young people have reached the age of 18 but remain within a family placement, limited local authority budgets have meant that the benefits to which young people are entitled can represent a means of 'topping up' the cost of these placements.

*Everybody was charged with maximising the income of Staying Put so that beyond the pilot, hopefully we would have a sustainable scheme.*

Any requirement of young people to maximise their income through benefits has implications for the wider aims of the Staying Put pilot.

One of the aims of the pilot is to support a more gradual and stable transition for young people to maximise their chances of engaging in education, training and employment. Local authorities within the Staying Put pilot offer either full or partial support to young people continuing in higher education. These young people, like all young people attending full-time higher education cannot claim most benefits. However, care leavers attending university do have access to other financial support including a grant through Access to Learning (under which care leavers are a priority group), Care Leavers' Grant,

Government Maintenance Grant and other assistance if the young person has disabilities or is a parent. Care leavers who wish to access basic or further education courses can claim housing benefit and income support until the age of 21 but only if they do so before their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday. Thus, these young people are subject to *time-limited* access to benefits to facilitate their engagement in education.

Entitlement to housing benefit for young people within the Staying Put pilot is another area that has presented major challenges to local authorities. One local authority applied for local housing allowance for those in the Staying Put pilot and experienced no difficulties in agreeing this locally; '*we did actually put in a claim very early on...it just went through*'. However, other authorities had difficulty in establishing that those in a Staying Put placement were eligible for housing (and other) benefit(s):

*they're in further education, entitled to housing benefit, they're entitled to Income Support, they get the application and say, well, no, you're in the care of the local authority, NO, they're care leavers... How can I convince the Department of Work and Pensions on a regional basis and benefits officers [to allow] access and smoother transition and acceptance of the service that we have?*

One local authority encountered extreme difficulties with their local housing departments who were concerned that claims for local housing allowances for Staying Put placements were, in fact, a contrivance. At the point of the interviews with local authority leads, this issue was still under discussion. Establishing a young person's liability for rent and how this rent breaks down into board and lodgings were identified as challenges.

Issues were not only confined to eligibility criteria for benefits but also revealed differences in perspective concerning whether or not care leavers should be expected to claim benefits, regardless of whether they were entitled to them or not and the extent to which this reflects the experiences of young people living in the general population:

*Speaking personally, we should be saying to young people, “Okay, we’ll support you with further education. You can do part-time work etcetera. However, if you encourage people to make income support claims, which in most families they don’t because they can’t, you then may exclude those young people from being able to do part-time work and they may fall foul of the Income Support regulations or whatever. And so I think we’re still grappling with that.*

*We don’t want to push our young people into a life of benefits. It was suggested to some of the other pilots that it’s a good lesson for them to learn the benefits system and all this stuff. What we’re saying is we want them... they should have bigger aspirations.*

In March 2010 the National Care Advisory Service (NCAS) published its report, *What could make a difference: care leavers and the welfare benefits system*, outlining challenges<sup>5</sup>, barriers and recommendations for the current benefit arrangements for young people leaving care (National Care Advisory Service, 2010). The Department for Children, Schools and Families’ response outlined plans to continue to develop benefits guidance for care leavers (with NCAS); to support local initiatives to help care leavers apply for benefits two weeks before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday; and consider flexibility in the income support rules for ‘second-chance’ learning (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010).

### ***Financial arrangements for carers and young people***

#### ***Payments to Staying Put carers***

Interviews indicated that most of the pilot authorities accepted the principle that young people should be contributing to their placements (where appropriate) post 18. However, there were considerable variations in how such arrangements were or would be operationalised. This has implications for both foster carers and the young people concerned.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.leavingcare.org/news/185/>

Local authorities have adopted different payment models for Staying Put carers. Under any pre-existing fostering agreement, payments to carers would be split into a fee element and an allowance element. Allowances would vary depending on both the needs of the child and the levels of training and qualification embarked upon by the carer.

The way in which payment structures with the Staying Put pilots have been developed can be grouped as follows:

- payment structures which seek to continue arrangements as per pre-18 foster care placements;
- payment structures which seek parity with foster carer payment structures but where carers receive payments from different funding sources;
- payment structures whereby former foster carer remuneration is replaced with a new fee structure; and
- negotiations concerning payment structures still underway.

Some authorities have continued payments to Staying Put providers as if they were still foster carers and carers have experienced little or no change in both the amounts they are paid and the way in which they are paid. These authorities are predominantly operating their Staying Put pilot with a strong emphasis on the continuing of a familial relationship and pre-existing foster care placement. It is deemed important not to change the financial nature of the relationship *as experienced* by the carer and the young person. These local authorities may well be investigating alternative funding streams to supplement and replace the current pilot grant but the relationship between the carer and the young person is not expected to bear the burden of the need to raise funding to support the placement. These authorities are not just concerned by any potential strain that the need to raise finance within the relationship might present, they are also concerned about the changes in role

that this might impose on the carer and young person. A priority in these authorities is the preservation of the rights of the carer to remain a carer.

*...it's a massive cultural shift from someone that's lined up to be a carer to be something else... a nurturer, they're nurturing young people and suddenly they're saying but you've got to pay for your board and lodge. It feels very different to me.*

*...foster carers didn't want to be landlords. They wanted to continue to be the parents.*

At least four authorities have sought to maintain some level of parity with foster carer payment structures but carers receive their payment from a number of different sources. A Staying Put fee is paid to carers which is enhanced by the benefits paid to the young person and/or a contribution from a young person's earnings from any employment.

Authorities recognised that whilst they were seeking to avoid foster carers being penalised financially for continuing a placement post-18, there was a change in foster carers' roles:

*...we asked them to be home-based so therefore they say 'you've asked me to do this but now you're asking me to do it for less money'...there's a drift position in so far as we want them to care for them but we can't pay the allowance at those rates because we can't afford it..*

Some authorities saw the change in payment structure as a demarcation of a new phase of the relationship requiring a new role on the part of the carer:

*we feel that the roles they (carers) provide is completely different because they're not carers anymore, they're providing a service, if you like, to get that young person to the point where they can leave the placement with as many skills as possible.*

This change in payment mechanism has very practical implications for carers. Under previous arrangements carers could expect a regular monthly payment from the local authority paid through bank transfer directly into their account. Under Staying Put arrangements this monthly transfer could reduce significantly. Additional monies making up the full amount due to carers would come from other sources.

Carers may experience delays in their payments caused by factors outside of local authority control, for example, by delays in the processes to claim and receive benefit payments:

*...it was about being transparent ourselves...it's a trouble-shooting exercise really because we had to reassure (carers) that the safe route of the payment arrangements wherein the department gives them a single sum of money religiously, regularly...we're asking them to shift away from that to an arrangement that would be disrupted just by an application to housing benefit...there might be delays...we had to be very flexible really...the key is reassurance but at the same time explaining that it's a different system....*

One local authority has a payment structure for Staying Put whereby former foster carer remuneration is replaced with a new fee structure. In one case, existing foster care placements (including kinship placements) have been included or 'converted' into an existing Supported Lodgings scheme. Fees paid to carers in this scheme have been lowered to reflect the rates more commonly paid to providers within the existing scheme, many of whom were not previously providing foster care placements for under 18-year olds. The change in payment levels is directly linked to a reduction in the level of service required. The provider may not be providing all of the support needed by the young person:

*It's not about how complex the needs of the young person are, it's also about how much support they [the provider] are able to provide...so if you've got somebody with quite complex needs and a provider who is at work all day that*

*might be fine because they're getting support from elsewhere, but we are going to pay the providers for the support they are giving.*

Some foster carers within the pilot will therefore have taken a drop in income in order to continue a placement post-18. Some authorities were candid that foster carers were motivated by other factors other than money including strong and enduring attachments to young people:

*Some carers were saying 'Even if we haven't had the pilot, we would have found some way', they would be using words like nurture, cherish, love, really important concepts, so they would have found some way.*

Authorities continued to support young people in a Staying Put placement whilst attending university and higher education. The level of payment authorities were willing to offer foster carers to facilitate this ongoing relationship were variable and often made on a case-by-case basis. Decisions were influenced by the financial implications for carers, depending upon individual circumstances, for example, whether maintaining a room for a continuing placement meant that the carer could not foster another child and would suffer a loss of income as a result. If there was no loss of income, then fees would be paid only for weekends back at home and holiday periods.

*...so even a young person who's away 30 to 35 weeks of a year at university, we're obviously supporting them whilst they are at university, but we're supporting their care through the payment of a retainer...we're investing very heavily in giving the conditions which allow carers to make a decision to commit to a young person and without suffering too much of a financial loss.*

If maintaining a room would result in a loss of income then a retainer would be paid in addition to weekly fees for holiday periods. It might also be the case that where young people leaving a full-time placement to go to university might not be able to retain their previous room because of the impact on the foster carers' income, they would continue to be a part of the family and return



to the family home *'perhaps sleeping on the settee or perhaps sharing a room with a family member'*.

#### *Contributions from young people*

All of the local authorities within the pilot had developed or were developing a protocol for young people to contribute to their placement costs from benefits or employment where appropriate. Attitudes and beliefs around this contribution were varied. While some saw this contribution as an essential aspect of the transition to adulthood and a symbol of adult responsibility that went hand-in-hand with the new rights of the young person post-18, others identified dilemmas:

*...the idea that young people need to contribute financially to their situation is a difficult one. I think, for us and for the carers – the idea that you are actually starting to charge someone who was in effect part of your family.*

This authority is investigating alternative funding provision for the end of the pilot and described it as:

*tortuous to try and arrive at what is fair, what we thought is fair in terms of both the carers' allowances and...what would be fair for the young adults in terms of their contribution.*

Another authority identified the difficulties that young people might have in giving their carer a proportion of their housing benefit directly. A three month period had been agreed whereby housing benefit was paid directly to the carer before transferring responsibility for payments over to the young person:

*..if a young person has never managed their finances, it's a lot to do suddenly, I mean that's the other shift for, not only the young person, but for the foster carer ... I'm going to hand over money, I'm going to have to buy things for myself, take financial responsibility and on top of that make sure that I'm giving rent from the housing benefit...*

Local authorities also identified that Staying Put carers had very different views on whether or not it was appropriate for young people to be expected to make a contribution to the household income:

*Foster carers are not homogenous...like the person who thinks that making a contribution is very important...and other foster carers say 'I don't think it's fair that young people should make a contribution. I think they should be able to save up for when they move on you know...'*

## **Conclusion**

Preliminary findings, based upon authority experiences of implementing Staying Put in practice reveal the complexities of trying to replicate normative experiences of the transition to adulthood in care settings. While some authorities have targeted the pilot at young people who have established relationships with foster carers and/or those in EET, others have sought to provide a wider cohort of young people with the opportunity to remain living with foster carers or other providers beyond the age of 18. Subsequent phases of the evaluation will facilitate exploration of the implications that different conditions of entitlement to Staying Put have upon young people and those caring for them. The cost and capacity implications of such decisions for the local authorities concerned will also be examined further.

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## ANNEX A

### **Evaluation aims, objectives and methodology**

The evaluation will assess the extent to which Staying Put meets the objectives above and will ascertain the costs and benefits of the pilot compared to standard leaving care provision and that offered under Right2BCared4.

The overarching objectives of the evaluation are:

- To explore the role and contribution that Staying Put can make to promoting positive outcomes for young people, including:
  - remaining in employment, education or training
  - nurturing attachments to significant 'parental' figures
  - making the transition to adulthood in a more gradual way just like other young people who can rely on their own families for this support.
  
- To identify models of best practice in setting up and implementing the Staying Put pilots, including:
  - training and support for young people and foster carers
  - promoting and empowering young people to participate in planning their transition to adulthood
  - local authority management of 'capacity' in order to both support young people who wish to remain with carers at 18+ and also maintain a sufficient supply for younger children
  - resolving insurance, tax and benefit issues and other barriers to implementation of the pilot.
  
- Calculate the unit costs of Staying Put and explore how these compare with standard leaving care provision and Right2BCared4 (utilising data from the Right2BCared4 evaluation)

- Describe the costs of the Staying Put pilot and set these against outcomes from the pilot cohort
- Consider the costs of rolling out the Staying Put pilot to other local authorities.

## **Methods**

**Phase 1** of the study (December 2009 to April 2010) will be conducted in each of the 11 Staying Put pilot sites. The approaches that areas have adopted to implement the initiative will be mapped and interviews conducted with the Staying Put leads to explore the challenges and issues encountered in the early stages of the pilot. An interim report will be submitted to DSCF in April 2010.

**Phase 2** of the study (May 2010 to March 2011) will involve collection of management information system (MIS) data on two cohorts of young people. This will facilitate analysis of similarities and differences in outcomes for young people who have Stayed Put compared to those who chose not to remain with their foster carers beyond 18 and those who did not have the option to do so (pre-pilot cohort).

In-depth work will also be undertaken in six of the pilot sites using a mixed methods approach. Former care leavers, trained as peer researchers, will interview young people to explore the views and experiences of those who Stayed Put, those who opted to move to independence and those whose foster carers felt unable to maintain placements for them once they reached 18. The perspectives of their personal advisors and foster carers will also be sought. A bottom up costing methodology (Beecham, 2000) will be employed to examine the costs of the pilot compared to standard provision and set these against outcomes. The costs of rolling out the programme will also be explored.

## **ANNEX B**

### **Interim report methodology**

#### **Mapping approaches to meet the aims and objectives of Staying Put**

##### **Purpose and method**

A preliminary mapping exercise was undertaken by the research team at the beginning of the evaluation. The purposes of this were:

- to identify any pre-existing post-18 policy and service provision in each of the pilot authorities; and
- to identify similarities and differences in delivery plans for each of the local authorities to meet the aims and objectives of Staying Put.

The Staying Put pilots originally included 10 local authority sites. Following local authority restructuring two new authorities have been established in one of the areas.

The research team asked representatives in each of the pilot sites to submit their original application to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) outlining their plans for delivering Staying Put and any other supporting documentation they felt would facilitate this initial mapping exercise. Original bids and accompanying documentation were submitted by each area.

The research team constructed a mapping template which was designed to capture and systematically record information on Staying Put pilot provision and proposed models of delivery. Where possible a distinction was drawn between existing policy and practice, which provided a foundation to support implementation of Staying Put, and changes proposed to meet the aims and objectives of the pilot. Broad categories examined during the exercise included: overarching principles underpinning service provision; financial

arrangements including taxation and insurance; fostering capacity including recruitment, retention and training.

Findings from the mapping exercise are discussed and presented alongside data from interviews with managers' responsible for implementing Staying Put in pilot authorities ('Staying Put leads').

## **Semi-structured interviews with Staying Put leads**

### **Purpose and method**

Interviews were undertaken with the Staying Put leads in 10 pilot sites. An interview was also conducted with a representative from an authority that was not funded as a pilot site but who has decided to implement the principles of Staying Put. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain an insight into the core issues and challenges that had arisen from implementing new models of delivery to meet the Staying Put objectives and how authorities had begun to integrate extended placements within the care leaving framework and pathway planning.

Data were analysed using a thematic coding matrix to explore similarities, differences and variations between local authorities. Findings from the interviews are also being used to support the development of research tools for subsequent phases of the research.

During analysis of the interview data, the research team took the opportunity to hold a focus group with operational staff from the six pilot authorities who had been selected for in-depth evaluation in the next phase of the evaluation. The purpose of the focus group was to obtain a frontline perspective on the core issues and challenges that had arisen from operationalising Staying Put. Although the data have not been fully analysed and are not included within the initial findings presented in this report, it became clear that there were some differences between the managerial and strategic positions outlined by the Staying Put leads and the views of staff delivering Staying Put on the ground. Local authorities were therefore asked to provide clarifying data on issues where their position appeared unclear.

The report draws together findings from the mapping exercise, Staying Put lead interviews and the clarification exercise to identify some of the issues that are emerging as local authorities seek to implement plans to meet the aims and objectives of Staying Put.



**Ref: DFE-RR030**

**ISBN: 978-1-84775-792-0**

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September 2010