

CABINET

DATE	9 th April 2022
REPORT OF	Councillor Ian Lindley, Portfolio Holder for Children and Education
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Joanne Hewson Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director for People, Health and Care
SUBJECT	Department for Education Staying Close Grant
STATUS	Open
FORWARD PLAN REF NO.	CB 04/22/02

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

Delivery of the Staying Close Project supports young people leaving residential care to develop their skills as they transition into adulthood. This supports the delivery of the Council's Strategic objectives by enabling young people to access suitable housing and develop the skills needed to live independently.

The recommendations contribute to the following Council strategic outcomes:

- All people in NEL feel safe and are safe
- All people in NEL enjoy good health and wellbeing
- All people in NEL fulfil their potential through skills & learning

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2017 North East Lincolnshire Council (NELC) successfully bid to deliver a Staying Close Pilot. The pilot was intended to run for two years to support young people leaving residential care. Further funding was secured as the Department for Education (DfE) extended the project into a third and fourth year.

NELC has been asked to work with the DfE as part of the national roll out of the Staying Close programme.

NELC has applied for funding to support the continued delivery of our Staying Close scheme.

NELC have submitted a bid for £870,228 to fund a further three years' service provision. We anticipate the DfE decision on this bid to be announced by the end of April 2022

As such we are seeking Cabinet approval to accept, if offered, the DfE grant award.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. If awarded, approves acceptance of the Department for Education grant for the delivery of the Staying Close project.
2. Delegates authority to the Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director for People, Health and Care in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children and Education to deal with all matters arising around service delivery and compliance with conditionality attached to such funding. .
3. Authorises the Assistant Director Law, Governance and Assets (Monitoring Officer) to complete and execute all legal documentation arising.

REASONS FOR DECISION

To accept the funding from the Department for Education will enable vulnerable young people to continue to access the specialist support of the Staying Close project.

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

- 1.1 In July 2017 the Council was successful in securing funding from the DfE to pilot a new initiative Staying Close. This was intended to give children leaving residential childcare additional support as they leave care and begin living more independently.
- 1.2 The pilot was intended to run for two years but funding was later extended by the DfE and it has now been operating for four years in NEL.
- 1.3 In 2021, NELC was granted additional monies to develop a second phase of the pilot. £275,023 was awarded to fund three eco-dwellings placed in the grounds of three of our children's homes.
- 1.4 In 2021, NELC rented five studio flats as part of the pilot. Four of these are for young people aged 16-18 and one is used by staff. Workers are on site from 4 pm every day and throughout the night. Young people use these as trainer flats where they can safely learn how to live independently.
- 1.5 In December 2021 North East Lincolnshire Council were invited to support the Department for Education with the national roll out of Staying Close.
- 1.6 NELC are now working with the DfE so that lessons learned locally can be factored into the national roll out of the scheme
- 1.7 To enable the continued delivery of the Staying Close Project in NEL an application has been submitted to the Department for Education to continue funding until March 2025.
- 1.8 The Staying Close Project provides bespoke support for young people leaving care and preparing for a more independent life.
- 1.9 The project includes:

- i. Weekly drop-in sessions for care leavers where they receive help and support with a variety of matters such as benefits, job search, emotional wellbeing, budgeting, etc
- ii. Access to food packages for a donation, as well as help to learn how to prepare tasty, nutritious meals
- iii. Support from the young person's preferred professional. Young people can choose who they feel would be best to support them in their journey to independence. The Staying Close budget provides funding to back fill delivery hours in the substantive post
- iv. Five Staying Close trainer flats for those who need a safe and supported environment to learn how to live independently.
- v. Three Eco Pods in the gardens of three NELC children's homes. The Pods provide a small but comfortable studio flat in a temporary building, with a sixty year estimated life span.
- vi. The project supports teenage parents to learn how to safely care for their children reducing or even eliminating the need for social care involvement.

1.10 The Staying Close project will also continue to:

- vii. Embed our operating model, Signs of Safety, in our approach to supporting young people moving towards independence.
- viii. Support young people to move from Staying Close accommodation to their own homes
- ix. Support care experienced young people to access relevant help such as benefits advice, mental health support, social activities to combat isolation, etc
- x. Support the use of Family Group Conferencing or Family Network Meetings to create effective support networks for each young person
- xi. Involve young people in project co-design.
- xii. Create and support opportunities for young people to provide peer support. We now intend developing this into a peer mentoring programme.

In November 2021, the project had demonstrated significant positive impact for young people.

- Prior to the Staying Close pilot only 30% of care leavers from children's homes were known to have been able to sustain a tenancy. 70% of the last cohort of care leavers from children's homes are now in secure tenancies.
- Prior to the Staying Close pilot approximately 75% of our residential care

leavers were not in education, employment, or training (NEET). In 2021, 36% of residential care leavers accessing the project were NEET.

- The project is currently supporting thirty three young people
- Since the pilot started, seventeen young people aged between 16 and 18 have been supported to return to the borough after living out of the area in a children's home.
- Each young person who has accessed the project has their own personalised support plan based upon individual needs. Young people are also able to choose who they want to support them.
- Young people are developing peer support networks so that they can help each other on their journey to independent living.
- Staying Close has developed good working relationships with a local housing partnership.

2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

2.1 Risks

2.1.1 The continuation of the project is judged to be poor by the DfE further damaging the council's reputation

2.1.2 The project is overseen by a DfE appointed policy adviser who makes a formal judgement about it every quarter. The NELC Staying Close scheme has always been judged as good by the policy adviser and so we are confident of being able to maintain this high standard for another three years.

2.2 Opportunities

2.2.1 Continued funding will enable NELC to continue provide bespoke support to care experienced young people and to extend the Staying Close offer to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children moving on from supported living.

2.2.2 Continued funding of the scheme will support the introduction of a peer mentoring program that will further enhance the help available to our young people.

3. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

3.1 Decline any grant awarded by Department for Education and close down the project

3.1.1 Would reduce the available housing and support for care experienced young people.

3.1.2 The NEL Children Looked After Sufficiency Plan sets out the need for the provision available through Staying Close and as such any decision to end the project would put additional demands on the Council to provide similar

provision using its own resources.

3.1.3 Would leave project staff vulnerable to redundancy.

4. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

4.1. The council made a commitment to the Department for Education in 2019 to be a part of the national roll out of Staying Close

4.2. The scheme is well regarded by young people and the DfE and is effective in its primary aim of enabling care experienced young people to successfully move from children's homes into their own accommodation.

4.3. In 2019 the Staying Close pilot was shortlisted finalists in under two categories in the Local Government Chronicle Awards, under the following categories: Health and Social Care "Not just staying close, but being close (Looked After Children) and Innovation "Staying close – a genuine innovation"

5. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1. The continued delivery of the Staying Close Project in NEL would be entirely funded by the Department for Education.
- 5.2. An application has been made to fund delivery from April 2022 to March 2025, at a total of £870,228

6. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. The Staying Close Project is aimed to support care experienced young people who have lived within children's homes.
- 6.2. The implications for children and young people of accepting or declining any grant awarded are detailed throughout this report.

7. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. There are no specific implications relating to the environment or climate change.

8. CONSULTATION WITH SCRUTINY

- 8.1. There has been no consultation with scrutiny however the portfolio holder will be kept informed of the progress of the bid.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. The Council was accepted as a pilot authority in 2017 to deliver a new DfE initiative project called Staying Close. The pilot was initially for two years but has been extended since this time and the Council has benefit from further significant funding. As a pilot LA it has been invited to apply for further funding to extend the programme for a further 3 years. The amount of funding is not guaranteed but based on the submitted bid if successful the value will be £870,228 over 3 years.
- 9.2. There is no formal requirement on the Council to match fund if the bid is accepted and as such there will be no call on Council funding.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. Immediate legal implications arising will be around the terms and conditions of any external grant funding and the completion of funding agreements and ancillary documentation. Legal Services will support this process, ensuring the interests of the Council are protected.
- 10.2. As individual projects arise throughout the delivery phase Legal Services will continue to support colleagues.
- 10.3. In making any decision of this nature, Cabinet should be cognisant of its duties and obligations pursuant to the Corporate Parenting Promise [Corporate parenting - NELC | NELC \(nelincs.gov.uk\)](https://nelincs.gov.uk)

11.HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. A decision to not accept the DfE grant would result in the need to consult on a review of the staffing arrangements which support the Staying Close Project. Appropriate HR advice would need to be sought to ensure that employment matters are dealt with in accordance with HR procedure, this would include Trade Union and staff engagement and consultation on potential redundancies. The consultation would need to take place prior to any public announcements or decisions.

12.WARD IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. This proposal affects all wards in North East Lincolnshire.

13.BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

14.CONTACT OFFICER(S)

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