

<b>Report to:</b>	<b>EXECUTIVE CABINET</b>
<b>Date:</b>	24 August 2022
<b>Executive Member:</b>	Councillor Bill Fairfoull – Deputy Executive Leader
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Alison Stathers-Tracey – Director of Children’s Services
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>STAYING CLOSE FUNDING: SECTION 31 GRANT AWARD</b>
<b>Report Summary:</b>	<p>The Council has successfully bid to receive £1.36 million of funding over three years from the Department of Education to support a pilot project entitled ‘Staying Close’</p> <p>The pilot will enable our children leaving care at 18 from children’s homes to access a much wider offer of support. The grant funding will allow the Council to offer a range of employment, transition, mental health, social work and housing support, which will make a step change in their outcomes. It also means our young people who lived in children’s homes will get comparable support to their peers in fostering who can stay with families until they are 21.</p> <p>The pilot builds on existing services, with a clear exit strategy for the grant funding, and is focused on reducing the need for services which are currently funded from placement budgets.</p>
<b>Recommendations:</b>	That Executive Cabinet be recommended to agree to accept the Section 31 Grant Award to support Staying Close.
<b>Corporate Plan:</b>	The ‘Staying Close’ pilot aligns to the priorities in the Corporate Plan; Priority 2: Aspirations and Hope; Priority 3: Resilient Families and Supportive Networks; Priority 4: Work Skills and Enterprise; Priority 6: Nurturing our Communities; Priority 7: Longer and Healthier Lives.
<b>Policy Implications:</b>	In line with existing policy.
<b>Financial Implications:</b> <b>(Authorised by the statutory Section 151 Officer &amp; Chief Finance Officer)</b>	<p>The overall cost of the scheme is affordable from within the grant offered by the DfE. Staffing costs are forecast to be £393,000 and the cost of equipment and overheads £45,800.</p> <p>Inflation for staffing costs have been built into future years awards at 3.5%, there may be a financial risk if changes exceed this level, however it would be expected that this would need to be managed within the overall costs of the scheme.</p> <p>The grant was not included in the budget approved by Council in February 2022 therefore formal acceptance of the grant is required.</p>
<b>Legal Implications:</b> <b>(Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)</b>	<p>The potential benefits to be gained from accepting this funding are set out in the main body of the report. The report does not contain any details of any conditions placed on the grant but it is usual practice for there to be clawback provisions which will be triggered if the funding is not allocated or managed as per the terms of the grant. It is therefore imperative that the project officers are clear on the remit of the spending and also the requirements in terms of managing and reporting.</p> <p>Given that this funding is being directed at such an important service provision which is also part of the council’s transformation</p>

programme Members may wish to have a further report in 12 months time detailing the outcomes from the additional funding.

**Risk Management:**

The success of the project will be a particular focus for the Corporate Parenting Board which receives regular reports on care leavers as well as the newly established Children's Scrutiny Committee.

**Background Information:**

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Adrian Rocks, Children's Head of Commissioning:



Telephone: 07971766560



e-mail: [Adrian.Rocks@tameside.gov.uk](mailto:Adrian.Rocks@tameside.gov.uk)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Staying Close is a service offer to children who have left care and who have previously lived in children's homes. It's designed to offer them practical, employment, emotional and social help in their lives as they exit care. It helps fill a gap, as their peers who live in foster care have the legal right to stay with foster families until they are 21.
- 1.2 While there is not currently a legal duty on councils to offer a 'Staying Close' service to its young people leaving care, the Department for Education is resourcing local authority pilots of the service. The intended outcomes of the project align to our Corporate Plan and Sufficiency intentions for our cared for children.

## 2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Department for Education (DfE) announced on 11 April 2022 it was accepting Expression of Interest (EOI) for an expansion of its Staying Close programme, which to date had operated in 5 local authorities. This allowed interested Councils to bid for a share of £36m of funding for Staying Close over the next three years; £6m in 2022-23, £12m in 2023-24 and £18m in 2024-25.million
- 2.2 The Department for Education identified the purpose of the programme as increasing the number of LAs with a Staying Close offer. The stated ambition of the funding was for:
  - Staying Close to be offered to as many young people as possible.
  - More LAs, over a wider geographical spread, to have a Staying Close offer.
  - Staying Close to be a recognised model of good practice that can be embedded into policy and practice and seen as an invest to save opportunity by delivering wider positive outcomes for young people leaving children's residential homes.
- 2.3 The DfE identified that each Staying Close offer should deliver the following benefits for young people leaving care from children's homes:
  - Accommodation stability: including access to improved housing options, reduced rates of evictions and fewer placement moves.
  - Wellbeing: positive changes in both mental and physical health and reductions in antisocial behaviour, episodes of going missing and criminal activity for young people at risk of these behaviours.
  - EET: increasing numbers of young people in employment, education and training, including through support gaining work experience, with application forms and advice and guidance.
  - Strong relationships and support network: an increase in social connectedness and developing healthy relationships.
  - Independent living skills: including improvements in cooking, budgeting, time management and practical skills.
- 2.4 The programme benefits as set out by the DfE align with Tameside's Corporate Plan, and with our Sufficiency Strategy, which notes *"Our children are prepared for adult life by the families and homes that care for them"* and will support the action to *"widen the volume and range of accommodation options for our young adults who are leaving care"*. Implementing Staying Close will help deliver priority 7 of our improvement plan *"Continue to Safely reduce the numbers of Children who need our care and improve outcomes for those we care for and care leavers"*
- 2.5 Tameside's Sufficiency Strategy is clear on our vision that the children we care for should have the opportunity to live with families; consequently our use of children's homes has steadily reduced from a peak of 102 in December 2020 to 79 in July 2022. While this trend is planned to continue there will, for a number of years, be young people who continue to be supported in residential and would consequently benefit from the Staying Close Service.

### 3. TAMESIDE'S BID AND AWARD

- 3.1 Despite a very challenging return deadline 17 days after the launch of the EOI, a proposal was developed involving colleagues from Children's Services, Housing, Employment and Skills, The CCG (as was) and Transformation. The DfE announced formally on 7 July that Tameside had been successful in the EOI and had been awarded

22/23	23/24	24/25	Total
£438,875	£454,235	£470,133	£1,363,243

- 3.2 Tameside's bid was designed to build on established good practice within the borough by 'building on strength'; the model targeted the new resource to increase capacity and extend the offer in established teams who are already delivering. The model will be led and accounted for by a project manager, who will manage staff in a 'matrix / shared management' arrangement to provide a cohesive project team, but take full advantage of the knowledge and experience of our current services.
- 3.3 The following model diagram, taken from the bid, shows the central Staying Close Team and how its staff team links to a range of existing services, to build capacity on established success.



- 3.4 The analysis undertaken by colleagues in finance as part of the bid notes cashable savings may be possible: *"The proposed Staying Close (SC) model would demonstrate cashable placement savings to the Council. The current average cost of an external 18+ Semi Independent (SI) placement is £51,397 per year. The proposed cost for Staying Close totals £14, 684 per placement per year."*
- 3.5 The exit strategy for the grant funding after year 3 is based around the savings described in 3.4 and building capacity within our existing teams which will leave a legacy from the grant funding.

- 3.6 The development of the offer will also enhance the value of other investments the council has made in the offer for our young people leaving care including in extending the Threshold offer and the launch of GM House and our Transition Support Service.
- 3.7 The Project Manager will be offered line management by the Service Unit Manager for Leaving Care and delivery will be shaped by a multi-agency steering group.

#### **4. INTENDED IMPACT & SUCCESS**

- 4.1 Tameside has historically had high numbers of cared for children resulting in a high number placed in external residential provision often outside of the Borough boundaries impacting on the ability to place into local tenancies post 18 years of age. We currently have 80 post 18 year old care leavers who are still placed in semi-independent accommodation when ideally as adults they should have their own tenancies.
- 4.2 The extra capacity the project would bring as outlined in the above diagram would support this cohort in ensuring they were secured into appropriate tenancies as well as strengthening systems and processes to coordinate earlier transition planning matching care leavers prior to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday with Registered Providers and tenancies in the private sector. We would expect to see very few if any post 18 year old care leavers remaining in semi-independent accommodation within the first 18 months of the project.
- 4.3 The grant award for Staying Close will also provide greater capacity to engage and link some of our hard to reach care leavers into meaningful education, employment and training opportunities (EET). Evidence shows that young adults are more likely to engage and remain in EET if they have stable and secure living arrangements. We would expect the project over the course of the 3 years to increase the number of care leavers in EET and bring Tameside in line with statistical neighbours.
- 4.4 We know that for many young adult care leavers, due to their life experiences and trauma they have suffered they will often need access to additional mental health and emotional wellbeing support which can be difficult to access in a timely responsive way. Additional resource with a dedicated mental health worker will support this vulnerable cohort and assist in navigating and accessing appropriate support in a timely responsive way which in turn will contribute to tenancy support and engagement with EET.
- 4.5 Children's Services are well experienced in managing grants and providing progress reports to Government Departments and Grant funding agencies as well as internal governance and accountability arrangements. For example, the Department for Education has recently agreed to continue providing grant funding to the Social Worker in Schools program on the basis of evidence submitted on its impact and feedback from Head Teachers and multi-agency professionals. The success of the project will be a particular focus for the Corporate Parenting Board which receives regular reports on care leavers as well as the newly established Children's Scrutiny Committee.
- 4.6 The model 'builds on strength' by growing capacity in existing successful teams, and has an exit strategy for the grant funding linked to the lower costs of the model compared to the current situation of post 18 year old care leavers remaining in commissioned Semi-Independent Accommodation incurring significant costs to the council.

#### **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 5.1 As set out at the front of the report.