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**Giving care leavers the chance to stay:**  
Staying Put six years on

**CBRE**

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP  
TO BUILD A BETTER FUTURE

# Giving care leavers the chance to stay: Staying Put six years on

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## Acknowledgements

Action for Children would like to thank the young people with experience of care and Staying Put, and the foster carers who have supported young people in Staying Put arrangements, for their contributions to this report.

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We are indebted to The Fostering Network, who kindly shared the raw findings of their 2017 survey of local authorities with Virtual Worlds Research so that this modelling would be possible and provided advice on the project. We admire and are grateful for their research and continuing advocacy for Staying Put.

Finally, this report would not have been possible without the generous support of Action for Children's corporate partner, CBRE. We would like to take this opportunity to thank them for going above and beyond to support care experienced young people throughout the course of our three-year partnership.

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# Foreword



Young people leaving care have often been through trauma, as well as experiences of upheaval and instability. And yet they are expected to become independent and to stand on their own two feet at an earlier age than most of their peers, often with fewer resources, smaller support networks, and no safety net.

Three years ago, staff at CBRE voted for Action for Children to become their UK charity partner as part of their community programme 'Building a Better Future'. Since then, Action for Children and CBRE have been working in partnership to make sure that children in care and young care leavers receive the level of support that they need and deserve. It is something we take seriously and both our organisations have committed to the Care Leaver Covenant.

Action for Children works with care experienced children and young people through the charity's children's homes, fostering and adoption services, and children's rights and advocacy services. With CBRE's donations, incredible staff fundraising and volunteering effort, as well as technical pro-bono work, Action for Children has been able to develop The Big Welcome, a digital handbook to help children in care feel more in control when moving between placements. The Big Welcome gives children an insight into their future family and home, so that they can settle in and feel safe and secure more quickly.

Crucially, CBRE has also provided funding for Transition Workers around the UK, who can support young people with experience of care aged 16 to 24 with the challenging transition from care into independence, minimising the impact this change can have on their lives.

This report, made possible by CBRE, explores the experiences of young people leaving care, and Staying Put in particular, the life-changing policy that empowers young people leaving foster care

to continue to live with their foster families until the age of 21. With the pandemic exacerbating existing problems, young people leaving care are facing a move into a very uncertain future. Youth unemployment is rising fast, and digital poverty could leave young care leavers increasingly isolated.

Staying Put offers young people the chance to stay in a loving and nurturing family environment for longer, giving them the stability they need when so much around them is changing.

We hope that the government listens to the testimonies of the young people and foster carers who have shared their stories, and acts upon the findings and recommendations within this report to ensure that all young people leaving care have the foundations they need to thrive.

*Melanie*

**Melanie Armstrong**  
Chief Executive  
Action for Children

*Steve*

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# Definitions

## Allowances

Foster carers' allowances are intended to cover the costs of a child's food, clothing, travel and other expenses. The Department for Education sets minimum allowances for foster carers looking after children and young people aged up to 17, taking the age of the child or young person into account. However, there are no set minimum allowances for Staying Put carers.

## Fees

Fee payments are separate to allowances and recognise foster carers' skills and expertise in caring for children. Local authorities and Independent Fostering Providers are not legally obliged to pay fees to foster carers or Staying Put carers, and the amount different foster carers receive varies hugely. Yet carers may not be able to continue to care for a young person without proper financial assistance.

## Personal Adviser

When a young person in care turns 18, they no longer have an allocated social worker, and instead are supported by a Personal Adviser. Personal Advisers provide advice and support to young care leavers up to the age of 25, and help to make sure the young people they work with have access to the appropriate services. Personal Advisers may also be referred to as Leaving Care Workers.

## Staying Close

Staying Close provides a similar offer to Staying Put for young people in residential care. The scheme empowers young people to live independently once they turn 18, but, crucially, in a location close to their former children's home with ongoing support from that children's home. The government has been piloting variations of this scheme through the Innovation Programme. However, unlike Staying Put, Staying Close is not yet statutory.

## Staying Put

Staying Put was first introduced through the Children and Families Act 2014. The policy enables young people in foster care to continue to live with their former foster carers up until the age of 21. This means they do not have to move out when they leave care at the age of 18, and can benefit from continued stability and a supportive and nurturing family environment for longer. By law, local authorities must provide advice, assistance and support to the care leaver and their Staying Put carer (including financial support for the carer).

## Staying Put Coordinator

Some local authorities have invested in the role of a Staying Put Coordinator or Staying Put and Supported Lodgings Coordinator, who is responsible for leading on the development of Staying Put arrangements. The Coordinator liaises with foster carers, providing regular guidance and support, and works to ensure that the arrangement is successful.

## Unregulated accommodation

Independent and semi-independent provision (commonly known as unregulated accommodation) can offer young people in care and care leavers the opportunity to live with an increased level of independence. However, these settings are not registered or inspected by Ofsted, and there are concerns that some young people are being placed at risk or in settings that cannot meet their needs. The government has recently consulted on proposed reforms to the delivery of independent and semi-independent provision.

# Executive summary

For young people leaving care, the future can look uncertain – particularly now, with young people hardest hit by the rising unemployment the coronavirus crisis has left in its wake. This report explores how we can make sure all young people leaving foster care can stay with their carers for longer if that's what they want, giving them the security and opportunity they need to thrive going into adulthood. But all care experienced young people – regardless of whether they've been in foster care, children's homes or supported accommodation – need to be given the same level of support on their journeys into independence.

The average age for leaving home in the UK is 23.<sup>1</sup> Yet young people who are in care are expected to leave care at the much younger age of 18.

This is despite the fact that care experienced young people have very often experienced childhood trauma, and this can impact on their wellbeing and mental health, their education, and their future career opportunities.

Approximately 39% of care leavers aged 19, 20 and 21 in England are not in education, employment or training, compared to 11% of all young people across the UK.<sup>2</sup> And we know that youth unemployment has gotten worse during the coronavirus pandemic. The unemployment rate generally is at its highest level in two years, and young people have been hardest hit.<sup>3</sup> According to the latest figures, those aged 16 to 24 have suffered the biggest drop in employment compared to other age groups.<sup>4</sup> Young care leavers will be a group at particularly high risk.

Care leavers are also at higher risk of becoming homeless than other young people.<sup>5</sup> A 2017 survey of care leavers by Centrepoin found that 26% had sofa surfed, and 14% had slept rough since leaving care.<sup>6</sup>

The pandemic will only have increased the urgency of the situation. Since the onset of the coronavirus crisis, young people have had problems contacting children's social care services, including Personal Advisers (also known

as Leaving Care Workers) not responding to phone calls and visiting young people less frequently.<sup>7</sup> Despite guidance suggesting local authorities use some of their additional £1.6 billion in emergency funding to provide discretionary payments to care leavers to cover essential outgoings – such as rent payments – it does not appear that all care leavers were able to access this funding through their local Leaving Care teams.<sup>8</sup>

This is where Staying Put comes in.

**Introduced in 2014 through the Children and Families Act, Staying Put is now enshrined in the Children Act 1989. The policy empowers young people in foster care to continue to live with their former foster carers up until the age of 21, rather than having to move out when they turn 18. By law, local authorities must provide advice, assistance and support to the care leaver and their Staying Put carer (including financial support for the carer).<sup>9</sup>**



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The findings of the Staying Put pilots, carried out between 2008 and 2011, powerfully demonstrate the difference the opportunity to stay made to the young people who were able to continue living with their foster families.<sup>10</sup> By remaining in a stable and nurturing family environment for longer, they were able to take the time to prepare for independence, with the support of their former carers. This in itself helped to facilitate engagement with education, employment and training. The pilots found that young people who stayed put were more than twice as likely to be in full-time education at 19 than those who did not.

But there are concerns that not all young people who want to stay put are able to.

The most recent data shows that 57% of young people who had turned 18 in a foster placement were still living with their former foster carers under a Staying Put arrangement three months on.<sup>11</sup> The proportion of 19 and 20-year-olds who were still living with their former foster carers under the Staying Put scheme remains at 26%, the same as it was the year before.<sup>12</sup>

Of course, Staying Put is not the right option for every young person, and our aim should be to empower young people to make the choices that are best for them – and to give them a wide range of possible options. But we must have confidence that every young person who wants to stay put, can stay put. And we don't.

The Fostering Network has found that many young people in foster care still have to move out before they are ready, and this is largely due to a lack of funding.<sup>13</sup>

The government currently funds Staying Put through Department for Education Implementation Grants. But it has been clear for some time that Staying Put has never been adequately funded. During National Care Leavers Week 2019, the Education Secretary announced

that the government would give a £10 million boost to the Staying Put scheme (meaning that, for 2020/21, local authorities received a grant of £33.28 million, up from the £23.77 million granted in 2019/20).<sup>14</sup> This was welcome, but the future of Staying Put funding beyond 2020/21 is still unaccounted for, and, even with the uplift, local authorities will struggle.

Wider cuts to local authority funding, as demand on children's services has increased, left a huge £1.7 billion funding gap in 2018/19.<sup>15</sup> Such figures throw the scale of the challenge facing local authorities – even before the pressures created by the coronavirus pandemic – into sharp relief.

It would be unacceptable if even one young person who would stand to benefit from Staying Put was unable to because it wasn't possible for a local authority to support the arrangement financially.

That's why Action for Children held in-depth interviews with children's services representatives from five different local authorities across England. We wanted to know what the costs of Staying Put are for local authorities, what the implementation grant is spent on, and the challenges of implementing the policy more widely. It has become clear that local authorities spend the bulk of this funding on payments to foster carers, and that, at the root, the issue with the implementation of Staying Put is the insufficient level of funding for the scheme.

This led to modelling a number of different options the government could take forward to more effectively cover the costs of Staying Put.

#### **Option 1: Matching government funding to what local authorities are currently paying to foster carers.**

- The Fostering Network's 2017 survey of local authorities gives us a good idea of how much local authorities are currently spending on Staying Put.<sup>i</sup> As we know from our interviews with local authority stakeholders, the bulk of spend seems to go on foster carer payments.
- Projected total for 2021: **£51.4 million** (**£49.9 million** if contributions from young people are taken into account, see Option 4).

#### **Option 2: Proposed approach to comprehensively cover the costs of Staying Put, ensuring Staying Put carers are paid both an allowance and a fee.**

- The Department for Education sets minimum allowances for foster carers looking after children and young people aged up to 17, taking the age of the child or young person into account. There are no set minimum allowances for Staying Put carers, but, for this scenario, our researcher has used the set minimum allowances for foster carers looking after 16 to 17-year-olds.
- We also looked at fee payments for foster carers as part of this approach. Fee payments are separate to allowances and recognise foster carers' skills and expertise in caring for children.
- Projected total for 2021: **£82.1 million.**

#### **Option 3: Proposed approach to more effectively cover the costs of Staying Put, ensuring Staying Put carers are paid an allowance.**

- As including fee payments to foster carers significantly increased costs, the researcher also modelled a version of the approach above, simply removing the fee payments.
- Projected total for 2021: **£54.8 million.**

#### **Option 4: Proposed approach to comprehensively cover the costs of Staying Put, with assumption of young person's financial contribution to the arrangement through their earnings and/or Housing Benefit entitlement.**

- This approach mirrors Option 2, but assumes that the young person in the Staying Put arrangement will contribute financially.
- A young person's Housing Benefit is specifically referred to in statutory guidance as a way to facilitate a Staying Put arrangement. As this report will explore, there are some issues with this. However, it is worth exploring as part of this project, considering that a number of local authorities do expect this.
- Projected total for 2021): **£75.3 million.**

<sup>i</sup> With thanks to The Fostering Network, who kindly shared the raw findings of the survey with Action for Children's researcher so that this modelling would be possible.

**Option 5: As with Option 2, but 84% of fees removed.**

- This approach aims to capture the estimated 84% of Staying Put carers who will also be caring for a child aged under 18, and so should be continuing to receive a fee payment regardless. This should reduce the estimated level of funding required.
- However, it should be borne in mind that although the vast majority of local authorities use a skills-based approach to fee payments, nearly a quarter operate a system based on the age of the children (and in this case, carers would lose out on fees, even if they had another child in placement).
- Projected total for 2021: **£49 million.**

**Option 6: The government's current grant allocation approach, projected forward five years.**

- From 2014, local authorities have been receiving an annual Implementation Grant from central government in order to roll out Staying Put. For 2020/21, the combined grant allocation covering all local authorities was £33.28 million. But no funding has been announced beyond 2021, despite the fact that, even with the national government grants, funding levels for Staying Put are still inadequate. Local authority spending power has also reduced significantly in recent years.
- Projected total for 2021: **£34.1 million.**

**These projections reveal a substantial gap between what the government has been paying local authorities, what local authorities have been spending on Staying Put, and what former carers might expect to be paid.**

We are urging the government to consider the funding options we have set out and commit to providing dedicated, sustained and sufficient funding for the Staying Put scheme, to support care experienced young people preparing to make the transition from care to independence.

The government's commitment to care leavers, particularly over the last 10 years, is clear. But we are calling on the government to go further, particularly at this time. And not just for young

people turning 18 in foster care, but for those in children's homes and supported accommodation, too.

All young people leaving care, regardless of placement type and whatever their needs might be, should be able to expect and benefit from the same level of support from their corporate parent.

And this support must empower them to begin their lives as adults with the confidence and firm foundation they deserve.

## Recommendations

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*We urge the government to:*

1. Commit to providing adequate funding to local authorities to deliver Staying Put for 2021/22 as soon as possible.
2. Carefully consider each of the options we have set out here, and develop a long-term funding model for Staying Put as part of the upcoming Care Review, preferably based on our Option 2, which has a high likelihood of affordability for carers, covering both fees and allowances.
3. Ring-fence any funding for Staying Put, to ensure funding goes straight to the care leavers who need it.
4. Set minimum allowances for Staying Put carers supporting young people aged 18, 19, and 20, as they do for foster carers looking after children aged up to 17.
5. Update the guidance around Staying Put, specifically to:
  - a. highlight the importance of the Staying Put Coordinator role, and the difference investment in such a role can make to address the staffing pressures Staying Put can create;
  - b. explore possible ways of supporting carers – and the type of training they might continue to benefit from as Staying Put carers – emphasising the importance of this;
  - c. address inconsistencies of approach when it comes to setting up Staying Put arrangements with Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) carers;
  - d. provide more detail on navigating the transition to a shared lives arrangement.
6. Publish the evaluation of the Staying Close pilots as soon as possible, and act to put Staying Close on a statutory footing at the earliest opportunity.
7. Consider how to improve its offer to young people turning 18 in supported accommodation, as part of proposed reforms to unregulated accommodation.
8. Explore the implementation of Staying Put, and the different experiences of young care leavers, as part of its upcoming Care Review.

# Introduction

Every young person leaving care deserves to have the foundations they need to thrive – especially as they will not have had the safe and happy childhoods they should have.

## Youth unemployment

This is particularly urgent now, with youth unemployment soaring in the wake of the coronavirus crisis and the strains of living during a pandemic being most strongly felt by those who are already vulnerable.

Young people with experience of care are already at high risk of homelessness, and they are more likely to be NEET (not in education, employment or training) than young people who have never been in care.<sup>16</sup> And young people generally have been hardest hit by the worrying effects of the pandemic on employment levels.<sup>17</sup> The Institute for Fiscal Studies recently demonstrated that young people are more than 2.5 times more likely to be working in the sectors most affected by the pandemic, and the Youth Employment Group has highlighted concerns that the crisis will lead to an additional 640,000 unemployed 18 to 24-year-olds this year.<sup>18</sup> We know that youth unemployment can lead to multiple scarring effects, like lower pay in later life and reduced life chances.<sup>19</sup>

Care leavers need our support more than ever.

## Staying Put can help

It is therefore crucial that we make sure that young care leavers are able to access the very support that should already be in place for them. Support like Staying Put, a policy first introduced in 2014 that gives young people in foster care the chance to continue to live with their former carers if that's what they want. Staying Put can give young people the stable, nurturing and loving family environment they need as they grow into adulthood and make decisions about what they want to do next.

One of the local authorities we spoke to as part of this project put it this way:

*“With our Staying Put placements, what you can see is that they’ve had that family care and love from a foster family over those difficult years which can be 18, 19, 20, you know. If you try and set yourself up in the world, get a job, it’s difficult isn’t it?”*

**Crucially, we know that the evaluation of the Staying Put pilots found that young people who stayed put were more than twice as likely to be in full-time education at 19 than those who did not.**<sup>20</sup>

## Fulfilling Staying Put’s potential

Yet, even before the pandemic, The Fostering Network found that many young people in foster care still have to move out before they are ready, and this is largely due to a lack of funding, as well as poor planning.<sup>21</sup>

In 44% of cases where Staying Put arrangements did not go ahead, they had been prevented by local policies and payments, with more than half of those unable to go ahead because the foster carer simply could not afford the drop in income.<sup>22</sup>

And we are concerned that, with the cuts to local authority funding over the last 10 years, and the new pressures created by coronavirus, it will be harder for young people to take hold of that opportunity.

Ofsted data indicates that of the 3,770 young people who turned 18 in 2018/2019, half continued

to live with their foster carers.<sup>23</sup> Department for Education data suggests that only 30% of young people were still living with their foster carers at the age of 19.<sup>24</sup> It is important to recognise that Staying Put will not be the right option for every young person leaving foster care. But we need to make sure that funding is not an obstacle standing in the way of young people making the choice to stay put – particularly when the outside world right now is in the midst of a global pandemic, with all the economic challenges that brings. We want more young people staying put, not less.

There couldn't be a worse time for a young person to be moving out into independence before they're ready.

## Future funding for Staying Put

The government has funded Staying Put since it was first introduced over six years ago, and the £10 million boost to the scheme last year was warmly welcomed by the sector. But it isn't enough, especially as the question of funding beyond 2020/21 is uncertain. We urge the government to consider the different funding options this report sets out, and commit to allocating adequate and sustained funding for Staying Put.

The Department for Education's upcoming Care Review gives the government another opportunity to explore the implementation of Staying Put, and the challenges – as well as the positives – that young people, foster carers and local authorities have experienced in the more than five years since the right to Staying Put was first enshrined in law.

The Care Review must also look at the experiences of those young people who leave care having lived in children's homes or supported accommodation. At the moment, different young people will have different experiences depending on the type of placement they were living in when they turned 18, yet their needs are likely to be similar.

**We have to make sure we're doing all we can to give each and every young person leaving care the support, the stability and the foundations they need to thrive.**

# Chapter 1

## Background to Staying Put: six years on

It has now been six years since the policy ‘Staying Put’ was first introduced in England through the Children and Families Act 2014. This duty on local authorities enables young people in foster care to do just that once they turn 18 – stay put with their former foster carers up until the age of 21, if that is what they and their foster families want.

Similar policies have been introduced in Scotland (under Continuing Care) and Wales (through When I Am Ready arrangements), with the Going the Extra Mile (GEM) scheme operating in Northern Ireland (although the GEM scheme is non-statutory).

This was a vital change to the law. Before, many young people in foster care would have seen their 18th birthday as a cliff edge, rather than the celebration it is for most teenagers. The average age for leaving home in the UK is 23.<sup>25</sup> Yet we were expecting young people in foster care, who are very likely to have experienced childhood trauma and loss, to move out and fend for themselves at 18. We clearly don’t expect our own children to go out into the world alone when they turn 18. But it was the reality for children in foster care until recently (and it still can be for young people in residential care). This is particularly shocking when you consider what young people in care have been through and how this can continue to affect them.

Approximately 63% of looked after children and young people are in care due to abuse and neglect, and they will also have undergone separation from their family and friends.<sup>26</sup> Such experiences can impact on children’s development, relationships with others, and their ability to keep safe.<sup>27</sup> A 2005 study showed that nine out of 10 children who have experienced abuse go on to experience mental health difficulties by the time they are 18.<sup>28</sup> In England, 60% of children in care are reported to struggle with their emotional and mental health, and a high proportion experience poor health,

social and educational outcomes after leaving care.<sup>29</sup>

Crucially, care leavers are also at higher risk of becoming homeless than other young people.<sup>30</sup> This is despite the fact that care leavers should be considered to be in ‘priority need’ if they are aged 21 or under.<sup>31</sup> A 2017 survey of care leavers by Centrepoint found that 26% had sofa surfed, and 14% had slept rough since leaving care.<sup>32</sup> Studies have reported that young people can often feel unsafe in their post-care accommodation, and many care leavers move multiple times following their transition into independence, sometimes experiencing periods of homelessness in between.<sup>33</sup> The Bright Spots programme found that only 63% of the care leavers surveyed always felt safe where they live, and just half felt settled.<sup>34</sup>

The coronavirus pandemic makes supporting young care leavers all the more urgent, too.

Department for Education guidance for children’s social care services, with its emphasis on local authorities’ responsibilities towards care leavers, was welcome.<sup>35</sup> But we know that since the onset of the crisis, young people have reported problems contacting children’s social care services, including Personal Advisers (also known as Leaving Care Workers) not responding to phone calls, visiting young people less frequently, and sending text messages rather than holding conversations over the phone.<sup>36</sup> Despite guidance suggesting local authorities use some of the additional £1.6 billion in emergency funding to provide discretionary payments to care leavers to cover essential

outgoings – such as rent payments – it does not appear that all care leavers were able to access this funding through their local Leaving Care teams.<sup>37</sup> Evidence from Become’s Care Advice Line suggests that some care leavers have been struggling with reduced access to their entitlements at this time, such as the Setting Up Home Allowance, due to ongoing delays and restrictive policies around their use.<sup>38</sup>

Further, care leavers can often fall into the category of ‘hidden homeless’ (for example, those who might be sofa surfing) and so the emergency measures instituted to support rough sleepers will not have helped many care leavers in precarious housing situations.

Having to adapt to moving out into independence when potentially struggling with lower levels of resilience and contracted support networks due to experiences of trauma in childhood can be a huge

challenge – particularly during this time – and a challenge young people leaving care shouldn’t have to face.

When it comes to children and young people’s wellbeing, stability is crucial, particularly in the relationships they have with the trusted adults in their lives, like their foster carers.<sup>39</sup> Research with children in care also demonstrates the importance of having a sense of control and feeling emotionally and physically safe.<sup>40</sup>

This is where Staying Put comes in, and why the policy has been so positively received and championed by children’s sector organisations and politicians of all stripes. Former Children’s Minister Edward Timpson, who oversaw the introduction of Staying Put, has mentioned the scheme as one of the things he is most proud of from his time in government, saying, ‘As a policy reform, Staying Put was the right thing to do.’<sup>41</sup>



## CASE STUDY



*“I am part of the family now, and obviously the relationship’s not going to dip off or be affected by me moving out. It’s still going to be family.”*

**Jack first moved in with his foster family at the age of 14, after his mum passed away. He’s lived with his foster carers and their three daughters – who he thinks of as his sisters now – ever since.**

Around six months before his 18th birthday, his foster carers, his social worker and his Leaving Care Worker started talking to him about Staying Put. Jack speaks of it as ‘the natural route’. His foster carers made sure he felt part of the family, in the same way as their daughters, and as, at that point, he wasn’t personally ready to move out yet and be independent, it felt right to be able to stay put. Having that certainty made him feel comfortable and relaxed.

*“Ever since the day I moved in to the present day I’ve not been treated any different.”*

Jack made the decision to start working, and it was then that his carers started a conversation with him about contributing financially to the Staying Put arrangement. They wanted to get him ready for the financial obligations he’d be under once he moved out and started having to pay bills and rent.

*“As a collective we agreed to pay 20% of my wage, which I was happy with, because obviously it gets me used to managing a budget, contributing to the home, and getting used to... paying my way.”*

Jack emphasised how much he’s been able to learn in the time he’s been staying put. His carers have shown him how to run a home, how to manage stress, and how to cook (spaghetti bolognese is his speciality). When he was younger, he just wouldn’t have been ready to take all that in.

*“Now, obviously, I’ve been shown that, and I’ve took it all in, and I feel like I’m at the right stage in my life, financially and independently ready now, to make that step.”*

And Jack is taking that next step now. At the age of 19, and almost two years into his Staying Put arrangement, Jack is now in a position where he can buy his own home. He’s clear that if he’d had to move out at 18, this wouldn’t have been a possibility for him. Staying Put has made all the difference.

*“I am part of the family now, and obviously the relationship’s not going to dip off or be affected by me moving out. It’s still going to be family.”*

Like Jack’s story, the findings of the Staying Put pilots, carried out between 2008 and 2011, clearly demonstrated the difference the opportunity to stay made to the young people who were empowered to continue to live in their foster families.<sup>42</sup> By having the opportunity to remain in a stable and nurturing family environment for longer, they were able to prepare for independent living in their own time, benefiting from the stability and continued support that came with that. This in itself helped to facilitate engagement with education, employment and training. The pilots found that young people who stayed put were more than twice as likely to be in full-time education at 19 than those who did not.

This is vital. In terms of education, attainment for children in care is much lower than for their peers.<sup>43</sup> In 2018/19, 6% of care leavers were reported to be in higher education, and yet 50% of the total student population progressed to higher education in 2017/18.<sup>44</sup>

Approximately 39% of care leavers aged 19, 20 and 21 in England are not in education, employment or training, compared to 11% of all young people across the UK.<sup>45</sup> And we know that youth unemployment has only gotten worse during the coronavirus pandemic. The unemployment rate generally is at its highest level in two years, and young people have been hit the hardest.<sup>46</sup> According to the latest figures, those aged 16 to 24 have suffered the biggest drop in employment compared to other age groups.<sup>47</sup> Young care leavers will be a group at particularly high risk.

This dramatically underscores how important it is that care experienced young people are effectively supported and empowered.

The government has announced several reforms for care leavers. As well as the introduction of Staying Put, from 2017 care leavers have been able to access the support of a Personal Adviser up to

25, regardless of whether they are in education, employment or training or not. Local authorities now also have to publish a local offer setting out the support their care leavers can expect from them. The Care Leaver Covenant has been launched, along with the establishment of a Care Leaver Covenant Board, comprised of ministers from across government who will work to address the key barriers facing care experienced young people.

But we urge the government to focus its attention on Staying Put once again. In 2019, only 1,970 of the 3,450 care leavers in England aged 18, who were eligible for Staying Put, actually stayed put.<sup>48</sup> Of course, Staying Put is not the right option for every young person. But 1,130 18-year-old care leavers were either considered to be living in unsuitable accommodation last year, or no information was known about where they were currently living.<sup>49</sup> We have to ensure that every single young person who wants to stay put, can.

And it looks like this is simply not the case right now.

# Chapter 2

## Funding for Staying Put: the challenges

### How is Staying Put funded?

When first introduced, Staying Put was funded directly by national government through the Department for Education’s Implementation Grants (under the ‘new burdens doctrine’). In the first year, £7.4 million was provided. The figure then rose to £14.8 million the following year, increasing to £22.2 million the year after.

In July 2016, the then government committed to continuing to financially support local authorities to implement Staying Put up until 2020, using the £22.2 million providing in 2016/17 as a baseline.<sup>50</sup> It was also confirmed that funding would be up-rated by 2% each year to take inflation into account.

Year	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
<b>Implementation Grant</b>	£7.4m <sup>51</sup>	£14.8m <sup>52</sup>	£22.2m <sup>53</sup>	£22.85m <sup>54</sup>	£23.3m <sup>55</sup>	£23.77m <sup>56</sup>

The government has stated that the totals have been calculated using information from the independent evaluation of the Staying Put pilots, as well as evidence from the annual children looked after data return (also known as SSDA903) from local authorities on the numbers of children ceasing to be looked after from foster care placements each year.<sup>57</sup> This is also used to distribute the annual grant allocations across local authorities each year, taking into account the number of looked after children who were in foster care placements in each local authority at the time of their 18th birthday.

It has been clear for some time that, even with the increase from the initial £7.4 million, Staying Put has never been adequately funded. The Fostering Network has found that many young people in foster care still have to move out before they are ready, and this is largely due to a lack of funding, as well as poor planning.<sup>58</sup> In fact, in 44% of cases where Staying Put arrangements did not go ahead, they had been prevented by local policies and payments. More than half of these were unable to go ahead because the foster carer simply could not afford the drop in income.<sup>59</sup>



CASE STUDY

**Lynda and her partner have been dedicated foster carers for many years. Their oldest foster son came to live with them at the age of 13. He is now 46 and still very much part of the family, even though he lives and works in London.**

Currently, Lynda is supporting one young person, John\*, in a Staying Put arrangement. It’s her first experience of Staying Put. It is a difficult time for their family as well, as her partner is ill and Lynda needs to care for him too.

John was also 13-years-old when he first came to live with Lynda, and, although he has progressed really well over the last five years, he wasn’t ready to leave home at 18.

John has a learning disability which is classed as delayed development due to his past experiences. He may not be equipped to move out even when he’s older, as he is very vulnerable and terrified of living alone. She feels strongly that he will continue to live with her even after he turns 21.

Lynda now receives just over half of what she used to get paid when John was in foster care. She views the financial support she receives through Staying Put as sufficient because she and her partner have now decided to stop fostering.

However, the overall reduction in income did not take into account the fact that John’s needs had not really changed either, and that providing the Staying Put arrangement can actually be more expensive. As a child, the things he wanted didn’t

cost so much money. Now, as a young adult, he is interested in things like a gym membership – at £35 a month.

Food is also a key cost because of John’s childhood trauma. As a child, he didn’t always get what he needed – he now eats large amounts, and panics in case there isn’t going to be enough food available. If Lynda leaves out two plates of food – one for her, and one for John – John will eat both. As an adult man, the portions he requires are a lot larger too.

Before he secured his job, John received Income Support and Housing Benefit, and he could pay some of this to Lynda to help cover the costs of food. It wasn’t much, but she felt that it would be good practice for him for the future. However, the process of securing Universal Credit was a difficult experience and caused John a lot of stress, with problems arising because the Job Centre had no knowledge of Staying Put arrangements.

Lynda also felt uncomfortable taking money from him.

*‘To be honest, I don’t take it ... I know I’m supposed to, but I don’t. If I was to take that money from him, he wouldn’t have much left.’*

Staying Put has made a huge difference to John. Finding work is difficult for any young person, but it is particularly difficult for those who might have a learning disability, and John was struggling to find a job, with little outside help. Yet he successfully secured employment and has now been in his new job for five months, working 12-hour shifts. He hasn’t been late once. Lynda is very proud of him.

## The government's position

The inadequacy of the grant allocations for Staying Put specifically is taking place against a background of sweeping cuts to children's services funding over the last 10 years. Analysis shows that estimated funding for local authority children and young people's services fell by £2.2 billion between 2010/11 and 2018/19, a reduction of 23%.<sup>60</sup> At the same time, local authority spending on children and young people's services fell by 6%, or £536 million.<sup>61</sup> In short, there has been a significant reduction in central government funding per child and young person, falling from £571 in 2010/11 to £425 in 2017/18.<sup>59</sup>

While last year's announcement of £1.5 billion for adult and children's social care was welcome (and the figures above take this into account), we know this doesn't go far enough.<sup>63</sup> Diminished funding, as demand on local authority children's services has increased, left a huge £1.7 billion funding gap in 2018/19.<sup>64</sup> Such figures throw the scale of the challenge facing local authorities – even before the pressures created by the coronavirus pandemic – into sharp relief. We know that at least three councils are proposing multi-million pound cuts to children's services due to the financial impact of the crisis.<sup>65</sup>

On top of this, for a long time, dedicated funding for Staying Put was only guaranteed up until 2020. This undoubtedly created uncertainty. A 2016 report by the Early Intervention Foundation and Aldaba, commissioned by the Department for Education to explore spending on and delivery of children's services across local authorities, demonstrates that local authorities had identified Staying Put specifically as a factor that was particularly uncertain when developing plans for future spending, along with such factors as mental health needs and the number of homeless families.<sup>66</sup>

The Education Secretary's announcement during National Care Leavers Week in 2019 that the government would give a £10 million boost to the Staying Put scheme (meaning that, for 2020/21, local authorities received a grant of £33.28 million, up from the £23.77 million granted in 2019/20) was therefore warmly greeted by the sector.<sup>67</sup> The boost recognised the insufficiency of the funding granted previously, and ended the anxiety over the fate of Staying Put in 2020/21. The government acknowledged that the original funding was based on the Staying Put pilots under which 25% of those eligible entered into a Staying Put arrangement. However, the latest data showed that actually, 35% of eligible 18 to 20-year-olds were staying put.<sup>68</sup> Funding was therefore increased to reflect the fact demand is 40% higher than was expected originally.<sup>69</sup>

What's more, our aim should be to further increase the number of young people choosing to stay put, considering the advantages the policy can offer – as well as the fact that the average age for leaving home is 23. Young care leavers should have the same opportunities as their peers. Yet, as Ofsted has highlighted, despite the slight increase seen over the past two years of young people taking up staying put at age 18 – from a low of 46% in 2016/17 – it has not yet returned to the levels seen in the previous years, when percentages ranged from 52% to 54% (Department for Education figures are slightly higher, but this could be due to the inclusion of data for some care leavers beyond the age of 18).<sup>70</sup>

And, regardless of this year's boost, 2021/22 and beyond is still unplanned for.

Considering the challenging financial climate local authorities are operating in – particularly in light of the current crisis – it would be difficult to ensure that all young people will be able to stay put if they wish to without a sustained continuation of dedicated central government funding.

## What do local authorities have to say?

Action for Children held in-depth interviews with children's services representatives from five different local authorities across England to more effectively establish the costs of Staying Put for local authorities, what the allocation grant is spent on, and the challenges of implementing the policy more widely.<sup>ii</sup>

The local authorities we spoke to were united on the importance of Staying Put and the advantages and benefits the opportunity to remain with their former foster carers offers care experienced young people.

*"Corporately, we think that Staying Put is a really good thing. We recognise the benefits for young people. We've recently undertaken the Bright Spots Emotional Wellbeing sort of self-assessment with the young people, and the young people who were in Staying Put reported significantly higher emotional health and wellbeing scores, so we'd know the benefits of growing up and transitioning to adulthood in a family environment as opposed to residential or independent living."*

Local authority C

## Funding

Local authorities were also united on something else: the insufficiency of the central government grant allocations in meeting the costs of Staying Put. Ironically too, as one local authority pointed out, the more successful local authorities are in delivering Staying Put, the harder it is to make it work with the limited amount of funding available. This is a particular challenge in today's climate, as local authorities continue to grapple with the legacy of austerity and, right now, the difficulties thrown up by the pandemic.

## The wider cuts to children's services were consistently highlighted during our interviews, with one local authority stating that it had made it more difficult to sustain good practice.

Another expressed concern in regard to the lack of certainty around the future of government funding, fearing it would make it much harder for local authorities to meet their statutory obligations. At the time of the interview, this particular local authority was under great financial strain due to serious overspend, not just in regard to the Staying Put arrangements children's services were supporting, but across children's social care. The importance of commitment to Staying Put from Directors and Assistant Directors of Children's Services at a time of financial squeeze was emphasised by the research participants.

*"I think sometimes what can creep in is poor practice, where you start making alternative arrangements for... young people when they're not ready. But we're trying hard not to go down that, that route... But we haven't had to end any placements prematurely. We've tried really hard to work... with what we have. And what we make sure we do is alert the Director, the Assistant Director, that, you know, this is the spend we've had, this particular month it's likely to start going up, and these are the reasons."*

Local authority A

*"With the current management structure in [local authority B] I'm very confident in, the belief that, you know, outcomes for young people is so much better for Staying Put – for young people who stay put – and that I'm confident that this is something that would be sustained. In the future, who knows? You know, get a different Director or Assistant Director or something, and it may be different altogether."*

Local authority B

<sup>ii</sup> Focus groups were conducted in April 2019.

One local authority argued that children’s services require the ability to be financially flexible, so that they are empowered to respond to need. But, at the moment, we have it the wrong way round, with the danger that limited finances will actually restrict service provision.

*“We need to be given the financial flexibility to respond to the needs, rather than finances restricting the service provision.”*

Local authority A

*“You’re just sort of starting to embed good practice and then the funding gets pulled again.”*

Local authority D

The local authorities we spoke to all had similar answers when it came to the destination of the grant allocations, too: foster carers. The bulk of the funding received by local authorities appears to go on payments for foster carers, as opposed to the creation and maintenance of an infrastructure for actually managing the process of setting up Staying Put arrangements and embedding a culture that better enables the implementation of the policy. For example, hidden costs of the Staying

Put scheme – like Leaving Care Workers’ time and travel, or even entirely new roles, like the Staying Put Coordinators in some local authorities – are generally not covered, and have to be met in other ways.

### Calculating the amount carers receive

All foster carers receive an allowance to cover the cost of essentials for the child and young person (like food, clothing and travel). Some also receive a fee that recognises their experience and skills, depending on the local authority or Independent Fostering Provider they are registered to work with. There is no requirement for fee payments to be made.

The government sets minimum weekly allowances for foster carers that vary depending on the region the foster carer is based in and the age of the child in their care.<sup>71</sup>

Yet the government does not set minimum allowances for Staying Put carers supporting young adults over the age of 18. And, despite the fact that allowances are set at the highest rate for carers looking after 16 to 17-year-olds, it seems that after those young people turn 18 payments can look extremely different.

From a survey of local authorities, The Fostering Network found that Staying Put allowances range in value across England from £60 to £412.91 a week.<sup>72</sup> In 54% of local authorities, the Staying Put allowance was lower than that for 16 to 18-year-olds, and just 13% offered a separate fee payment for Staying Put.<sup>73</sup> Only nine out of the 19 local authorities that stated they paid a fee offered the same fee as that provided for pre-18 foster care.<sup>74</sup>

There are different views across the sector on this. Some take the position that the role of a carer offering a Staying Put arrangement to a young person on the verge of independence is different to that of a foster carer providing care to a child in a foster placement, to the extent that these carers should be differentiated as a ‘Staying Put provider’ or ‘Staying Put carer’, and their payments reduced as a result. There is also the stance that, though the role is different, it does not mean that carers should not be similarly compensated, particularly if carers are dependent on fostering payments, as the drop in income may mean that the foster carer is unable to go ahead with the Staying Put arrangement. This could mean a young person unfairly denied the support and stability that Staying Put offers.

The local authorities we spoke to had mixed views.

- One was clear that the situation does change once a young person turns 18, which is why staff make an effort to call carers Staying Put providers as opposed to foster carers following the transition.
- But others were more conflicted. Although, ideally, a young person should be moving towards greater independence, with the level of support they need from their carer dropping off, the assumption that a young person’s needs will reduce as they grow older is not always borne out. One could even argue that it’s the most difficult time of the young people’s lives, with so much change and so many difficult decisions to make – and the carer will obviously be called

upon to help the young person navigate that change and work through those decisions.

Whatever their view, however, local authorities were conscious that it was essential for carers to feel able to take the Staying Put arrangement on, and making financial assurances was a big part of that. One local authority stated that foster carers tend to go into fostering because they love it, but recognised that fostering is also their job and source of income. There was also evidence of some mistrust (for example, one local authority expressed concern that a carer might use the young person as ‘leverage’ in their negotiations around money, knowing the local authority will not refuse if it means the Staying Put arrangement can’t go ahead).

*“When things have got messy in terms of finances I think it’s a real shame, some of the conversations or the arguments that young people are exposed to because of that. You’ve got a young person in the middle of disputes about money with all sorts of accusations being thrown our way about lack of support...”*

Local authority C

One local authority (which applied a taper to Staying Put carers’ payments across the three years) acknowledged that the drop-off can be concerning for carers, but it was thought that carers did understand the rationale: that young people will be moving towards independence and so should – theoretically, at least – require less intensive support.

The government’s Staying Put guidance does not contain much detail when it comes to carers’ payments, leaving such decisions up to individual local authorities (although it is clear that some level of financial support is expected).<sup>75</sup> This enables flexibility, but has also created inconsistency and confusion. It also means that

### Minimum weekly allowances for foster carers

Age	0-2	3-4	5-10	11-15	16-17
London	£152	£155	£174	£197	£231
South East	£146	£150	£166	£189	£222
Rest of England	£132	£135	£149	£170	£198

## CASE STUDY

both carers and local authorities can be at a loss when it comes to what carers can reasonably expect to be paid when entering into a Staying Put arrangement.

Local authorities are expected to develop Staying Put policies that should cover how the arrangement will impact on the allowances the local authority provides, and whether other sources of funding can contribute to meeting the costs of Staying Put.<sup>76</sup> It should also include information on whether additional allowances that were provided when the young person was in foster care (for example, for holidays and birthdays) will continue to be offered, and if young people themselves may be expected to contribute financially from their wages or benefits.

The local authorities we spoke to continued to pay their Staying Put carers (indeed, their implementation grants are used for this purpose) but the approach taken tended to be different to that used for foster carers.

Fees and allowances were generally paid in a lump sum. In one local authority, Staying Put providers were paid a flat rate, meaning that carers supporting young people with more complex needs can take a financial hit when the placement transitions into a Staying Put arrangement. Another made a similar point, stating that the different fee 'levels' – reflecting a carer's experience, expertise and skills – no longer apply for Staying Put arrangements. If the young person has very complex needs, meaning more funding for the arrangement is required, the local authority did say they may seek to review the situation in a few months' time, to establish whether the set-up is suitable or if they need to look elsewhere to meet the young person's needs more effectively.

This local authority also undertook annual payment reviews for all their Staying Put arrangements; in some cases, this review was six-monthly. Another took a similar approach, applying a taper across the three possible years of the Staying Put arrangement. This means that with every year of the Staying Put arrangement that goes by, the

fee payment is reduced, cutting the overall cost. A full fee is paid in the first year, reduced to 50% in the second, and complete removal by the third. Yet carers may be dependent on continued higher payments, particularly if fostering constitutes their only form of income. Again, this may mean that they simply cannot afford to continue supporting the young person in a Staying Put arrangement.

What's more, as a third local authority argued, payment reviews may actually penalise success too. For example, if the Staying Put carer is successfully supporting the young person to move towards independence, their hard work and care may be rewarded with a reduction in payment. As a fourth local authority put it, to pay carers less would be a disincentive, and this is not fair to the young people who stand to benefit from the policy. This local authority had not changed fee payments at all as a result.

*"The principle that we've employed is that, it will be a disincentive to foster carers if they get less money, and that's not fair to young people, and contrary to the principles of the legislation. And so we've orchestrated it so that people are getting, in one way or another, albeit from slightly different sources, post-18... [enough that they] are not any worse off..."*

Local authority B

*"Our guiding principle is we're not going to say no to Staying Put just because we haven't got the money. We'd try and find that money from elsewhere."*

Local authority C

In calculating payments, the circumstances of the young people are taken into account as well, for example, whether they plan on attending university or joining the army, which would mean time away from home. However, this can cause difficulty in working out payments, particularly if it is expected that the carer keep the young person's room free for holidays. One local authority said it is 'one of [their] biggest challenges'.

*"If I was to end up getting kicked out of uni where would I go?"*

### Rachel has been with her foster carer for nearly a decade and the two of them consider each other family.

*"We're really close. She's pretty much family at this point. I don't even see her as a foster carer."*

Rachel's social worker first raised the possibility of Staying Put with them when she was 16, but when the time came, there were complications.

*"We discussed it when I was 16, and it was discussed that, yeah, I would be able to come home, and the room would be there for me. Then, when I turned 18, it kind of, like, went into the bin. Like the whole idea of them paying her to keep my room and everything, just sort of disappeared, and it became like a, yeah, she'll take me in [out of] just the kindness of her own heart."*

Rachel had achieved her dream of going to university, but this caused confusion around the level of financial support her carer would be entitled to when Rachel was away during term-time. Although the local authority committed to paying her carer when Rachel was at home, the drop in income was too much for her carer. As a result, when Rachel left to attend university, another young person who needed care moved in. This meant that Rachel had to give up her room, and all the security and peace of mind it offered.

She is still close to her carer, and knows she is welcome at home. But without the certainty of a room to stay in, the question of visits home and

what happens during the holidays creates a lot of anxiety – the very anxiety Staying Put was meant to resolve for young care leavers. Rachel finds it particularly hard because she has contact with her younger siblings (who are looked after by different foster carers) every month, but with travelling home made that much harder, these visits – which are so important to Rachel and her siblings – are put at risk.

*"It makes me feel a bit out of place... Now it's like I have to ask, 'Can I come back? Is there space?'... It kind of feels like I'm burdening myself off onto other people... Which kind of feels awkward, which then prevents me from even asking, which then prevents me from coming home, and then not seeing my siblings... I know I can easily ask and it won't be an issue, but I've got that personality... where I'm so scared for that rejection, or the awkwardness of, 'No.'"*

These difficulties have caused Rachel a lot of stress. She believes that Staying Put, when implemented as it should be, offers care experienced young people the safety and security they need. But in her own case, Staying Put has not given her what she needs – and, sadly, this is largely down to the issue of money.

*"That's the Staying Put agreement, that I've always got a place to go back to, or if anything was to happen with uni I'd be able to go somewhere. But obviously now that means if I was to end up getting kicked out of uni, where would I go?"*

Different local authorities had different approaches. One paid retainers to those Staying Put carers who were supporting young people either at university or in the army, and another said that they financially supported the carers during the holidays when it was expected that the young people would be back at home (although this same local authority expressed concern over the national shortage of fostering placements, and how this approach could be removing a potential placement for another child in care). The need to operate on a case-by-case basis was emphasised. Again, there is little detail in the government guidance on this.

*“Foster carers have challenged us, because they’ve wanted payment when the young person is not necessarily in their care, because they’re holding a room, and a bed. It’s all those things that are not as clear-cut for us to manage, so we end up negotiating on a case by case by case by case basis, because we are trying to be as flexible and as responsive as possible, without disadvantaging our, our young people.”*

Local authority A

*“With the university we’ll continue to pay for the Staying Put placement to remain open even at the same time while we’re paying for a young person to be away in university accommodation. So again, the investment in maintaining those placements because we know it’s what’s best for the young person is huge but again, it’s not reflected by government funding.”*

Local authority C

Allowances continued to be paid, but at an adjusted level. This is to take into account anticipated reductions in expenditure, for example, it is expected that the carer will no longer have to give the young person pocket money or a clothing allowance. The guidance suggests that young people who remain in a Staying Put arrangement may be able to claim means tested benefits for their personal needs once they turn 18, and the local authorities we spoke to made reference to

this. For example, one stated that as the young people will be able to claim Income Support – and so cover their own personal expenses – the payments to carers are reduced to reflect this. The local authority made the argument that carers do not experience a substantial loss as they are no longer expected to cover the young person’s expenses in the same way as before.

A couple of the local authorities alluded to the lack of set minimum allowances for Staying Put arrangements specifically. One said they base the allowance they pay to their Staying Put carers on the fostering allowance for carers supporting children aged 16 to 17, but they don’t have a standard allowance, and operate more on a case-by-case basis. The local authority may have to navigate difficult discussions around what the allowance should cover, for example, there can be disagreements around whether the cost of travel should be considered and included. Another local authority said that minimum allowances would give the local authority and their carers confidence that what was being offered was the right amount, and we would urge the government to introduce such minimum allowances for Staying Put.

*“The thing that’s most, most likely to guarantee it continuing would be some guidance about a minimum standard which then would be less expensive than this, than what we’re currently doing.”*

Local authority B

*“And it’s also making clear, I suppose, to carers, that the money we give, is money that we’re held accountable for spending. So we need to evidence that, whilst it’s being spent, the work that should be done with young people, young adults, is being done. Because we’re not paying for just a roof over their heads. If that was the intention, then we’d be looking at alternative arrangements.”*

Local authority A

The guidance also refers to other means tested benefits, with a particular emphasis on Housing Benefit. The level of Housing Benefit the young person is eligible for (normally based on the Local Housing Allowance, but if the young person is still provided with meals – as will very often be the case – this can be different) is also then deducted from the carer’s pay, in the belief that the amount will be made up through this alternative source of funding.

However, again, there are different views on whether care experienced young people should be expected to contribute financially to their Staying Put arrangement, and, in particular, whether they should have to apply for benefits to do so.

### Young people’s contributions

The local authorities we spoke to did make use of the young people’s Housing Benefit as an additional source of funding for Staying Put (and Income Support, as we’ve seen). They also spoke about the contributions young people can make from their wages or salaries, if they’ve moved into employment.

But it was clear this wasn’t always straightforward.

Firstly, employment. One local authority referred to undertaking a financial assessment once the young person starts working. There appeared to be a level of flexibility across the local authorities we spoke to, so that the young people are not disadvantaged. For example, the amount the young person pays might reflect what they would be expected to contribute if they were claiming benefits.

Local authority C, which had invested in the role of a Staying Put and Supported Lodgings Coordinator, fed back that the amount is dependent on the young person’s circumstances. For instance, if they are employed, they might offer 20% of their income to support the arrangement but this will be under review in the event that circumstances change. The Coordinator will offer advice on how much the young person might contribute, and then tailor the payments to carers accordingly.

*“When things change and circumstances change we will go back and say, ‘Right, you’ve got a job now, you’re earning this amount, maybe we need to look at what contribution you’re paying.’”*

Local authority C

However, a number of the local authorities mentioned that the young people they support can object to the amount they’re expected to pay in to support the arrangement. One local authority, which asks the young people to pay the equivalent of the shared accommodation rate for Housing Benefit in their area, said that it can be difficult. They said that there’s always a reason £65 is seen as too much for the young person to be paying.

*“And of course that’s another variable in terms of income. There’s always a reason why the £65 is far higher than is seen, is felt, to be reasonable. And often I get talked out of it and it gets waived, like, for example, they’ve got a car and they can only get to work by car and it costs an arm and a leg to run the car, etc., etc.”*

Local authority B

What’s more, local authorities shared that sometimes, young people do not want to claim benefits specifically. One local authority said that, in these cases, they cover the gap in funding left as a result. And it is easy to understand where the young people are coming from on this. Would parents expect their children to start claiming benefits in order to cover the rent they suddenly need to pay now they’ve turned 18? Equally then, one could ask why the local authority, as the corporate parent of children in care, should expect this.

Two of the local authorities made the argument that encouraging the young people to support the arrangement financially is actually exactly what a ‘responsible parent’ should be doing. It’s the start of the process of helping the young people to understand they’re moving into independence now. Young people leaving care can struggle with finances and budgeting – as many young people do



- and so to neglect to nurture those essential life skills during the period of stability that Staying Put offers would be a disservice to the young people.

*“I will go and have conversations with the young person and the carer and we’ll talk about finances and I like to put context in while we’re having that conversation because actually, we’re defining an end of being in care, we’re now looking forward to being an adult... It’s the start of that process of making that young person understand this is a trip into independence now and it’s no longer the local authority giving them everything they need and they have to stand on their own two feet.”*

Local authority C

*“It’s something I feel quite strongly about, to be honest, because it is one thing that we really struggle with, with young people that leave foster care or residential care when they’re 18 or before they’re 18, is the budgeting and the financial education. They have very, very little idea... So, I think it’s very important that we put that in place like a responsible parent should, in my view.”*

Local authority E

The local authorities emphasised the importance of transparency and collaboration: explaining where the money the young person is contributing is going, and, crucially, securing their agreement to the approach taken. These conversations can also work out the practical aspects of the arrangement. One local authority said that the young person and the foster carer agree between them how the young person’s financial contributions should be organised, for example, whether the young person should pay the carer weekly in cash, or monthly by bank transfer, etc. Another local authority said that the young person pays the Staying Put provider (former foster carer) directly, with the amount depending on how much they might be earning.

*“However, we have to work with our YAs [young adults] with a level of respect, because they are adults. If they*

*... are able to transfer the money across, that’s the arrangement we have, because those are subtle life skills they are starting to develop.”*

Local authority A

Government guidance also sets out the expectation that the young person’s pathway plan and/or ‘living together agreement’ that can supersede the pathway plan in many local authorities should outline all the practical considerations of the Staying Put arrangement.<sup>77</sup> The agreement should cover finance – including income and benefit claims – and wider preparation for adulthood and independence, as well as education and training activities and expectations around having friends and partners round to stay, and keeping foster carers up-to-date with plans.

*“There’s occasions where we’ve had meetings with the carer as well as the young person, but not specifically to talk about money. We’ve looked more at life skills for independent living, and that might then include the budgeting aspect, and how the carer might need to support and assist, which is where you might say, ‘Well, actually, you could make a contribution of this amount.’ Because, if you then say after the Staying Put, you want your own flat, what evidence do I have that you’re ready for that?”*

Local authority A

*“The key is getting that young person’s agreement because actually that’s the start of it. They have to agree to it because if they don’t they will stop paying and then it creates difficulties with the placement so it’s about making sure that young person understands and agrees.”*

Local authority C

However, it is not just the young people who can struggle with the idea that they now need to contribute financially to enable the Staying Put arrangement. Foster carers can, too.

One local authority spoke about how carers might recycle the money they receive from the young person back to the young person.

*“If you [as a foster carer] feel uncomfortable taking it off them just put it into a separate account and when they move on you can give them that money or put that towards a holiday, but it is that process that’s important. Our kids are fitting a lot of learning into a much shorter space of time than the general population and they’ve got additional trauma and it does feel really awful when we’re letting them go out into the big wide world unprepared and Staying Put is just a perfect place.”*

Local authority E

However, bringing monetary considerations into the relationship between the carer and the young person they support does carry a risk of disrupting the dynamic of that relationship, and the relationship is obviously what is so key to the stability that Staying Put can provide.

Although local authorities did emphasise the importance of helping care experienced young people to learn vital life skills through the process of contributing financially to the household, when it came to Housing Benefit there was some reflection that organising it so the money came direct to the carer, as opposed to direct to the young person, could be beneficial.

One local authority said the ideal scenario for them would be ensuring the money from Housing Benefit came directly into the local authority itself, who could then use it to pay the carer. However, more than one local authority highlighted issues with the transition to Universal Credit (UC), and it seemed different local authorities were having different experiences.

One local authority listed difficulties that included the long wait for the first payment, the

complications that ensued if carers were also claiming benefits, and carers’ objections to being deemed a ‘landlord’ under UC. They also said that under UC, it was no longer possible for the payment to go directly to the local authority. Another local authority did mention the option of setting up an Alternative Payment Arrangement (APA) for the carer to be paid directly, but not all the local authorities we spoke to appeared to make use of this, and there was still an issue in arranging for the money to go through the local authority. Local authority A said their Housing Department had made it clear that as the local authority is a third party, Housing Benefit would never be paid straight to them – yet this did not reflect others’ experiences.

*“Our Housing Department have made it very clear that we’re a third party, and therefore we’ll never be paid the Housing Benefit money directly. So the expectation is that, if the young person receives that money, they know to give it to the carer, and we pay the carer less [minus] the Housing Benefit money.”*

Local authority A

*“What we currently have to do is pay the foster carer for the first five weeks or however long it takes to set it up... the payment then is made and is backdated. So the carer has to give it us back. And then... the money goes direct to the carer and we deduct it from the amount that we pay them. So, you can imagine the chaos that gets caused in there.”*

Local authority B

*“It’s a shame if a carer doesn’t want to do it because of the Universal Credit complication, that actually we’re potentially putting a young person’s future at risk because of something that’s outside of everyone’s control so things like that need to be kind of ironed out and worked upon.”*

Local authority C

There is no doubt that there exists a level of confusion and inconsistency across local authorities when it comes to Staying Put, and particularly the funding of the policy. A small step in the right direction that the government could take now would be updating the guidance for Staying Put to reflect recent changes to the benefits system.

But there’s more the government could do. And it needs to do something if carers are to be financially supported as they need to be and Staying Put arrangements protected as they should be.

*“This may be totally naïve of me, but I don’t believe that this is something that our local authority would stop doing, because... Well, the legislation isn’t going to change, is it? Even if the funding changes, we’re still obliged to do what we’re doing for young people who are in foster care... Whether we would look at the funding, you know, whether... we’d change the amount of money that we would pay them [foster carers] is another thing.”*

Local authority B

# Chapter 3

## Staying Put funding: the solutions

The underlying issue with the implementation of Staying Put is the insufficient level of funding for the scheme.

With the generous support of CBRE, we commissioned an experienced researcher to model a number of different options the government could take forward to cover the costs of Staying Put.

We now have estimates for a number of different approaches, each projected forward five years.<sup>iii</sup> In projecting forward, different factors were

taken into account, for example, the number of 18-year-olds leaving care, the proportion of care experienced young people likely to take up Staying Put, and then to remain in a Staying Put arrangement, as well as projected Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation using Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) projections. See the methodology for more information.



<sup>iii</sup> We have also broken down these estimates by region and local authority. These breakdowns are available on request.

### Option 1: Matching government funding to what local authorities are currently paying to foster carers.

- The Fostering Network's 2017 survey of local authorities gives us a good idea of how much local authorities are currently spending on Staying Put.<sup>iv</sup> As we know from our interviews with local authority stakeholders, the bulk of spend goes on foster carer payments. Local authority spend is significantly higher than the Implementation Grant they have been receiving from central government each year in order to roll out Staying Put.
- The 2017 survey results have been projected forward to 2026.

### Option 2: Proposed approach to comprehensively cover the costs of Staying Put, ensuring Staying Put carers are paid both an allowance and a fee.

- As we have explored, the Department for Education sets minimum allowances for foster carers looking after children and young people aged up to 17, taking the age of the child or young person into account. These are intended to cover the costs of a child's food, clothing, travel and other expenses. There are no set minimum allowances for Staying Put carers, but for this scenario our researcher has used the set minimum allowances for foster carers looking after 16 to 17-year-olds.

- We also looked at fee payments for foster carers as part of this approach. Fee payments are separate to allowances and recognise foster carers' skills and expertise in caring for children. Local authorities and Independent Fostering Providers are not legally obliged to pay fees to foster carers or Staying Put carers. Yet carers may not be able to continue to care for a young person without proper financial assistance.
- For this approach, the researcher modelled a fee payment using the approach of one particular local authority, which is based on five different skill levels.
- For carers, in the absence of any other information, one carer per young person Staying Put is assumed. The researcher imputed skills across five levels taken from Ofsted fostering data showing the numbers of carers approved for different types of care at the national level, and then randomly assigned carers these levels.
- Where it appears (from The Fostering Network's survey) that the existing systems are more generous in some local authorities, those systems are retained.

### Option 3: Proposed approach to more effectively cover the costs of Staying Put, ensuring Staying Put carers are paid an allowance.

- As including fee payments to foster carers significantly increased costs, the researcher also modelled a version of the approach above, simply removing the fee payments.

<sup>iv</sup> With thanks to The Fostering Network, who kindly shared the raw findings of the survey with Action for Children's researcher so that this modelling would be possible.

**Option 4: Proposed approach to comprehensively cover the costs of Staying Put, with assumption of young person's financial contribution to the arrangement through their earnings and/or Housing Benefit entitlement.**

- This approach mirrors Option 2, but assumes that the young person in the Staying Put arrangement will contribute financially.
- A young person's Housing Benefit is specifically referred to in statutory guidance as a way to facilitate a Staying Put arrangement. As this report has already gone into, there are some issues with this. However, it is worth exploring as part of this project, considering that a number of local authorities do expect this, and it can go some way toward supporting a Staying Put arrangement, particularly considering the current funding environment.
- In the researcher's model, young people are aged through the system for three years with a proportion moving on from the Staying Put arrangement. Each year, each young person is randomly assigned to work, education, or not in education, employment or training (NEET), based on data from the Department for Education.
- For those who are NEET, Housing Benefit is assigned based on Local Housing Allowance, as well as £57.90 in Income Support/Jobseeker's Allowance. For those in work or training, a national minimum wage of £6.15 an hour is imputed. No further imputations are made for those deemed to be in education.

**Option 5: As with Option 2, but with 84% of carers no longer receiving separate fee payments for Staying Put.**

- This approach aims to capture the estimated 84% of Staying Put carers who will also be caring for a child aged under 18; these carers could therefore be assumed to be continuing to receive a fee payment regardless. This should reduce the estimated level of funding required.
- However, it should be borne in mind that although the vast majority of local authorities use a skills-based approach to fee payments, nearly a quarter operate a system based on the age of the children (and in this case, carers would lose out on fees, even if they had another child in placement).<sup>78</sup>
- What's more, it is important to emphasise that some carers do not receive a fee payment at all.

**Option 6: The government's current grant allocation approach, projected forward five years.**

- From 2014, local authorities have been receiving an annual Implementation Grant from central government in order to roll out Staying Put. For 2020/21, the combined grant allocation covering all local authorities was £33.28 million. But no funding has been announced beyond 2021, despite the fact that, even with national government grants, funding levels for Staying Put are still inadequate. Local authority spending power has also reduced significantly in recent years.



Amount to be paid to Staying Put carers (in thousands)

Year	Option 1: in line with what local authorities are already paying	Option 2: covering allowances and fees	Option 3: covering allowances	Option 4: mirrors Option 2, assuming contribution from young person	Option 5: reflecting proportion of carers also caring for an under-18	Option 6: government's current grant allocation approach
Likely affordability for carer	Medium	High	Medium	High	Medium	Low
2021	£51,404	£82,142	£54,826	£82,143	£48,973	£34,053
2022	£53,058	£84,152	£56,566	£84,151	£50,460	£35,103
2023	£54,890	£86,455	£58,529	£86,455	£52,108	£36,282
2024	£56,607	£88,548	£60,372	£88,548	£53,622	£37,448
2025	£58,376	£90,706	£62,628	£90,705	£55,203	£38,621
2026	£60,098	£92,755	£64,085	£92,755	£56,759	£39,728

Total costs to local authorities (in thousands)

Year	Option 1: in line with what local authorities are already paying	Option 2: covering allowances and fees	Option 3: covering allowances	Option 4: mirrors Option 2, assuming contribution from young person	Option 5: reflecting proportion of carers also caring for an under-18	Option 6: government's current grant allocation approach
2021	£49,893	£82,142	£54,826	£66,286	£48,973	£15,841
2022	£51,485	£84,152	£56,566	£67,825	£50,460	£16,382
2023	£53,264	£86,455	£58,529	£69,558	£52,108	£16,982
2024	£54,931	£88,548	£60,372	£71,121	£53,622	£17,483
2025	£56,664	£90,706	£62,268	£72,733	£55,203	£18,043
2026	£58,339	£92,755	£64,085	£74,264	£56,759	£18,611

Net costs to local authorities, assuming 2020/21 grant allocations (in thousands)

Year	Option 1: in line with what local authorities are already paying	Option 2: covering allowances and fees	Option 3: covering allowances	Option 4: mirrors Option 2, assuming contribution from young person	Option 5: reflecting proportion of carers also caring for an under-18
2021	£15,841	£48,089	£20,773	£32,234	£14,920
2022	£16,382	£49,049	£21,463	£32,722	£15,357
2023	£16,982	£50,173	£22,247	£33,276	£15,826
2024	£17,483	£51,100	£22,924	£33,673	£16,174
2025	£18,043	£52,084	£23,647	£34,112	£16,582
2026	£18,611	£53,028	£24,358	£34,536	£17,032

Contributions from young people (in thousands)

Year	Option 1: in line with what local authorities are already paying	Option 2: covering allowances and fees	Option 3: covering allowances	Option 4: mirrors Option 2, assuming contribution from young person	Option 5: reflecting proportion of carers also caring for an under-18
2021	£1,511	£0	£0	£15,856	£0
2022	£1,573	£0	£0	£16,327	£0
2023	£1,626	£0	£0	£16,897	£0
2024	£1,676	£0	£0	£17,427	£0
2025	£1,712	£0	£0	£17,971	£0
2026	£1,760	£0	£0	£18,492	£0

Year	Base projections of numbers of young people Staying Put
2021	4,009
2022	4,050
2023	4,103
2024	4,146
2025	4,190
2026	4,225

Whichever approach is taken, it is clear that the government’s current grant allocations simply are not sufficient. However, it is important to bear in mind that there is still no guarantee that local authorities will even continue to receive that level of funding into 2021/22 and beyond.

We would urge the government to consider each of these options, but particularly Option 2, which would better enable Staying Put carers to receive both an allowance and a fee that recognises their skills and expertise.

Local authorities are in urgent need of certainty when it comes to continued funding for this coming year and the years that will follow. We urge the government to carefully consider each of the options we have set out here, and for the relevant government departments to develop a long-term funding model for Staying Put as part of the upcoming Care Review. The current uncertainty around Staying Put funding inhibits strategic planning and can prevent services effectively embedding good practice.

We would welcome a guarantee that the government will continue to support local authorities through the Department for Education grant allocations at their current level. Yet our projections demonstrate that there will be a difference of £15.8 million – rising to more than

£18.5 million – between what local authorities are likely to be paying their Staying Put carers, and what the government will be providing local authorities with. And that’s if the grant allocations at their current level even continue to be delivered.

We also know that, even though local authorities are stretching themselves and spending more on Staying Put than they receive from national government, foster carers are not always able to afford the drop in income when they and the young people they support transition into a Staying Put arrangement. With no minimum Staying Put allowances, and no guarantee they will be paid a fee payment recognising their skills and experience, finances can be a real worry for carers.

Option 2, which takes both fee payments and allowances into account, is undoubtedly the most costly. But how do we measure ‘costliness’? Is it narrowly, in terms of initial costs – or in how improving the outcomes of some of our vulnerable young people can actually positively impact on the public purse? This option offers us the best assurance of affordability for foster carers, and, by extension, the best assurance that all young people in foster care will be able to benefit from the nurturing family environment that Staying Put offers. This is crucial. Turning 18 is already a particularly challenging, uncertain and disruptive

time for young people, especially those who are care experienced. But in the middle of a pandemic, some of the effects of which are being most harshly felt by the young? It is more important now than ever.

It should also be said that although we have realistically projected forward the numbers of young people Staying Put using the data we have to hand, we must be ambitious about encouraging greater numbers of young people to remain with their former foster carers – if that’s what they want to do and if it is what’s best for them – and to stay at home for as long as they need to, up to and, in some cases beyond, 21. Because that is what we would want for our own children.

## Recommendations

*We urge the government to:*

1. Commit to providing adequate funding to local authorities to deliver Staying Put for 2021/22 as soon as possible.
2. Carefully consider each of the options we have set out here, and develop a long-term funding model for Staying Put as part of the upcoming Care Review, preferably based on our Option 2, which has a high likelihood of affordability for carers, covering both fees and allowances.
3. Ring-fence any funding for Staying Put, to ensure funding goes straight to the care leavers who need it.
4. Set minimum allowances for Staying Put carers supporting young people aged 18, 19, and 20, as they do for foster carers looking after children aged up to 17.

# Chapter 4

## Vision for the future

We owe it to care experienced young people to be as aspirational as possible when it comes to giving them the opportunities, support and stability they need to thrive.

The most recent data shows that 57% of young people who had turned 18 in a foster placement were still living with their former foster carers under a Staying Put arrangement three months on.<sup>79</sup> This has risen from 55% in 2018, and 51% in 2017.<sup>80</sup>

The proportion of 19 and 20-year-olds who were still living with their former foster carers under the Staying Put scheme remains at 26%, the same as it was the year before.<sup>81</sup>

Of course, Staying Put is not the right option for every young person, and our aim should be to empower young people to make the choices that are best for them – and to give them a wide range of possible options. We should also bear in mind that a young person leaving a Staying Put arrangement at 19 can mean the scheme has been a success; the young person may only have needed an extra year at home to finish their education or develop the skills and confidence they needed to feel comfortable moving out and into independence. We only need to look at Jack's story (see page 16) to understand that.

However, we must also have confidence that every young person who wants to stay put, can stay put, and that they can remain at home with their former foster carers for as long as they need to. Reflecting on The Fostering Network's annual State of the Nation survey from 2018, which found 34% of the foster carers who responded had been prevented from entering a Staying Put arrangement with a young person in their care, despite both the foster carer and the young person wanting it, it is clear that we are not where we should be on this.<sup>82</sup>

There is no doubt this is about funding, as we have explored. The fact available funding only goes some way toward covering payments to Staying

Put carers, without even accounting for staffing, support around the arrangement, and training for Staying Put carers – all those elements which support the creation and maintenance of an infrastructure for actually managing the process of setting up Staying Put for young people – is a challenge that needs to be addressed. But there are also other issues that need to be resolved to ensure that we are offering every care leaver the best chance – and not just those leaving foster care, but those who have turned 18 in residential care and other forms of accommodation as well. Equality of opportunity is vital.

### Staffing and support

The local authorities we spoke to highlighted the sheer amount of work their Fostering and Leaving Care teams have to put into establishing and supporting the continuation of Staying Put arrangements.

The caseloads of social workers and Personal Advisers or Leaving Care Workers tend to be very high, and so it is difficult for them to offer extra support if a foster carer or young person is experiencing difficulties within the Staying Put arrangement.

*"I've still got social workers who are quite challenged with the caseload, you know, if you've got 24 young people on your caseload and maybe, I don't know, 10 of those placements are a bit rocky, that's actually quite difficult to just logistically manage. Our PAs – which is our 18-plus, who are going to be in Staying Put provision – we've got caseloads of 29, so again if you've got a placement that's a little bit rocky... what can we do to resolve that because we just don't have the capacity."*

Local authority D



### CASE STUDY

*"I think it's hard for a young person that hasn't got any parent to fall back on."*

**Sue and Derrick have been foster carers for over twenty years, with Lauren and her older sister joining their family home when Lauren was 11. She stayed with them until the age of 21 – thanks to the introduction of Staying Put – and although she now lives in London, she visits regularly.**

Since the beginning, Sue and Derrick have supported Lauren to follow her passions, and have been there for her whenever she's needed them, throughout her time at university and even now she's graduated too.

*"It's basically all down to Sue and Derrick because, you know, from a young age, they're always pushing me to, you know, be... the best version of myself... And I think if I didn't have the support of foster parents that I did, then I don't think I'd be where I am now."*

The Staying Put arrangement empowered Lauren to continue living with Sue and Derrick, who had been – and still are – such a source of support for her. But the process of arranging it wasn't so straightforward, as Lauren's Personal Adviser wasn't always sure about what Lauren was entitled to.

*"I even actually had to ask... one of my older foster carers who has a lot more children who are... in their teens going into the age of 18, who, kind of, knew more information. And she would actually say, 'Oh, look, Lauren, you're entitled to this, this and this,' and I didn't even know. And then I would question my PA, and she didn't really know herself confidently... she would have to go ask her manager and get back to me."*

*And that's the thing. She wasn't very good at getting back to me quickly."*

Lauren felt that she may not have been supported as effectively as she should have been because Personal Advisers have a lot of cases, and the young people they're working with don't always live in the same area, making it difficult to engage with each young person regularly.

*"When children, they get a social worker and they have one who stays with them for a while, you know... you create this, you know, close relationship... and a trust. And I think that once you get a PA, you don't know this person really... All they know about you really is the files they get about you. They don't really know you... They don't really get that time to get to know you in order to be able to support you in the right way."*

Lauren, Sue and Derrick were clear that Staying Put was an important option for young people. But it had to be done right. Lauren felt it was a team effort.

*"You know, Sue and Derrick, they showed me a lot of things, a lot of things that I had to do by myself in order to live independently on my own... paying for bills, and being able to cook, being able to clean... So, like I said... social workers, PAs and your foster carers, they all need to work together to be able to make sure the person they're looking after is well supported for when they want to leave the nest."*

Sue added, *"I think it's hard for a young person that hasn't got any parent... you know, to fall back on. So I think it's important that when they do put themselves through university and such like, there should be ongoing support for them."*

We've used an alternative image here, in accordance with how Lauren, Sue and Derrick wanted their story to be shared.

The Personal Adviser or Leaving Care Worker role can be particularly overwhelming and its importance is often underestimated. One local authority made the point that managing Staying Put arrangements is an add-on to an already extremely full-on role. Another said that with no Supervising Social Worker (also known as a Fostering Social Worker) providing the foster carer with support (as they would have for the fostering placement), there can be a doubling up of roles, with the Personal Adviser ending up trying to support both the young person in their transition into independence and the former foster carer adapt to their altered role as a Staying Put carer.

*“So what you’re ultimately expecting is your Leaving Care Worker to double up as the Supervising Social Worker, and as the child’s Social Worker. And in some instances, we’re doing multiple visits, you know, per month, per week, depending on what is, is going on. We’ve had occasions where some staff have made themselves available using the work mobiles just to support families outside of hours. And that’s something we’re really trying to, to kind of, manage.”*

Local authority A

It was accepted that staffing needs had not been taken into account in the development of the financial package for the implementation of the Staying Put policy.

*“We would, as a Fostering Service, not have been providing a service post-18, so we’ve had no additional staff to then support those placements and support the training that goes with that, there’s nothing.”*

Local authority D

*“So I think that bit [staffing] hasn’t been well thought through yet in terms of the financial package that’s required to really make that a safe, secure, kind of care giving arrangement for all the young adults.”*

*So I daresay what you might find is a variation in the standard of care, a variation in the ability of the carers to always manage those... young adults. And we are having to upskill the carers ourselves, without necessarily the fostering training... there is a financial implication, in that time has to be put in by our staff, managers. Sometimes we’re having multiple reviews to just help the care giving environment understand what it is we’re... we are asking of it.”*

Local authority A

### The role of the Staying Put Coordinator

Two of the local authorities that participated in our research had taken an innovative approach to addressing the staffing pressures the delivery of Staying Put had exacerbated: creating the role of a Staying Put Coordinator, or Staying Put and Supported Lodgings Coordinator.

One had made the active decision to prioritise Leaving Care Services specifically, with part of this investment committed to the position of Staying Put and Supported Lodgings Coordinator. Another had successfully funded the post through a time-limited project, which was intended to come to an end at the close of the 2019/20 financial year. Both emphasised the difference the role had made to best practice around Staying Put.

Prior to the commitment to and funding of the role in local authority C, every social worker and Personal Adviser had to create and develop their own ‘Living Together Agreement’ with each young person and Staying Put provider, leading to inconsistencies in the local authority’s approach. With the Staying Put and Supported Lodgings Coordinator in post, this changed. The Coordinator, with the local authority having granted them the time, capacity and resource to focus almost solely on Staying Put, is able to ease the pressure on other staff members and actively identify and address any issues which might negatively affect

the arrangement. They can pick up on when carers might benefit from more support or development, and ensure this is put in place.

*“Now we have somebody in place coordinating Staying Put and overseeing it, there’s a much more thorough approach so I think that rather than just saying, ‘Here’s your Staying Put money and that’s to pay the carers’, you need to think about what’s the infrastructure to back that up and make it consistent because previously, it was left to every social worker and Personal Adviser to come up with their own Living Together Agreement with a carer and a young person and it was just completely inconsistent and that’s one of the main benefits that I think [the Staying Put Coordinator] in his role has brought to our Staying Put offer.”*

Local authority C

Independence is also ensured: the local authority pointed out that it was important to have a degree of separation from the Fostering Service when so closely involved in the delivery of Staying Put, due to that service’s key performance indicators (KPIs) around foster carer retention and recruitment.

The local authority’s Staying Put offer is better as a result, and the better it is, the more young people will want to take it up. In fact, the local authority stated that the role had been linked to improved take-up.

*“I think that’s where my role comes in because I can focus on the young people, not targets, not recruitment figures, not retention figures or those things. It’s about what’s best for that young person and I’ll deal with the potential fallout as and when it occurs...”*

Local authority C

Local authority E was similarly unequivocal when it came to the success of the Staying Put Coordinator role, although for them it was a part-time post. Before the Coordinator post was established, the local authority was not in a position to support former carers when they reached out. Now, they benefit from a system the Coordinator has set up. This ensures that the Coordinator has regular meetings with the carer and the young person beforehand, a review after six weeks to check in on how the Living Together Plan is working for both parties, and six-monthly reviews subsequently. Even outside of this structured approach, her door is always open. It is possible to do a lot more preparatory work with families.

*“I think the big thing with the support is that when, in the initial stages, when there can be wobbles – you’re more likely to get your wobbles, aren’t you, because everyone is going through this big change. You’ve suddenly got this 18-year-old who decides they can go out and drink and do all the rest of [those] things and maybe foster carers haven’t had that age of a young person before so it’s new for them, a lot of the challenges. If they’ve got someone there, they can put in that support and they can work when they need it, so that we can get them through that bit. So, we’ve had quite a few, I think really, there’s been wobbles that I wonder if we hadn’t been able to offer that support at that time they probably would have thrown in the towel at that point.”*

Local authority E

This leaves the Leaving Care Worker free to focus completely on the young person (and not the former carer as well, which had previously caused some conflict within the worker’s role). Again, it was said that the Coordinator role supports with take-up, as well as the longevity of the arrangement.

*“We could name a good few where we’ve managed to keep the arrangements going longer because we’ve got that very definite difference whereas I think before they wouldn’t have lasted as long as they have done because the Leaving Care Worker would have got stuck in the middle and somebody would have been left feeling unsupported.”*

Local authority E

Local authorities suggested that support for the Coordinator post should be taken into account in future funding plans.

*“I think that you have to have – to make the scheme work successfully – I think you have to have a dedicated member, you know, depending on the number I guess, but in terms of supporting placements I think you need staff to do that. So, I think it [the funding] should cover that as well and that’s very much based on feedback from the providers. And they don’t need as much support as maybe fostering – you know, if they’re having different placements, because it is the same young person – but they do need some support.”*

Local authority E

In exploring the Staying Put Coordinator role in more depth, it appears other local authorities across England have also invested in the post, but, likely due to financial considerations, the role is often either part-time, combined (so a Coordinator might be responsible for Staying Put and Supported Lodgings, for example, as with local authority C) or tied into other roles, with extra responsibilities around Staying Put built into a Senior Social Worker’s job description. This might again run the risk of adding extra responsibilities to existing roles that are already highly pressured. However, there is still an advantage in specifying responsibility for Staying Put in certain job adverts, meaning that it is clearer where responsibility for Staying

Put lies within a Leaving Care or Fostering team, which could help to create consistency in the local authority’s Staying Put offer.

For instance, one London council’s introduction to the position within the job advert stated: ‘The Senior Social Worker will also take on the role of Staying Put Coordinator. The candidate must demonstrate a good understanding of the stages of a young person’s journey to adulthood and how Staying Put can support them with this. The Senior Social Worker will be the first point of contact when considering Staying Put arrangements including providing support and information to young people and foster carers about how Staying Put works in [the local authority]. They will also lead on the development of Staying Put arrangements, including consultation with interested parties.’

Another local authority in the North West of England has organised it so that the Staying Put Coordinator role is shared between two existing posts. Staying Put therefore accounts for 50% of one Leaving Care Social Worker’s time, and 50% of an Accommodation Officer’s time. In this particular local authority, part of the government’s grant allocation had actually been used to cover staffing costs, although their payments to carers tapered off in the final two years of the Staying Put arrangement, dropping to the standard rate for Supported Lodgings providers.

Across different local authorities’ job descriptions for Staying Put Coordinators, wording was often very similar, if not the same. The focus tends to be on providing information and advice to young people and carers on how Staying Put works in each individual local authority and what payments might look like, including what the young person may be expected to contribute. Coordinators must also act as the link between children’s services and other agencies like Housing Benefit departments and Independent Fostering Agencies.

One local authority’s description of the Coordinator’s role emphasised supporting the Staying Put carer and the young person, particularly around helping the carer to support the young person develop their independence. They must also provide regular supervision and conduct annual reviews.

The value of the role is clearly recognised. The Fostering Network’s Staying Put guidance identifies two local authorities with Staying Put Coordinators as examples of good practice when it comes to Staying Put.<sup>83</sup>

Given the pressures on staffing that Staying Put can contribute to, we would again recommend that the government update the guidance around Staying Put. The importance of the role of the Staying Put Coordinator should be emphasised, and the difference investment in such a role can make, particularly when full-time, permanent and made a role in itself, as opposed to an add-on to other roles.

*“I think we would benefit from some bespoke kind of staffing around the coordination of that rather than just being an add-on.”*

Local authority D

### Support for Staying Put carers

The pressures on staffing, as we’ve touched on, can impact the support carers and young people in Staying Put arrangements can expect to receive from the local authority.

Foster carers should generally expect to benefit from out-of-hours support, peer support groups and respite care or short breaks, if the local authority or Independent Fostering Provider (also referred to as Independent Fostering Agency) is supporting their foster carers effectively.

It does not appear that Staying Put carers are offered the same level of help. This could be challenging, especially if, as highlighted by local authority E, Staying Put carers continue to identify as foster carers (with the expectations that role entails) as opposed to a Staying Put provider or carer.

Two local authorities referred to support groups, but it was felt they did not work well for Staying Put carers. In one, there were confidentiality concerns from young people, and in another, it appeared there hadn’t been much interest from the Staying Put carers.

Two of the local authorities we spoke to explicitly stated that they did not offer out-of-hours support to Staying Put carers. One emphasised that they had to be realistic and think of the financial implications. Another said that this support was only offered through the Emergency Duty team. This same local authority did say it was possible for carers to contact their Supervising Social Worker up until 10pm, but this was with the proviso that they still had access to one.

The support (or lack of support) from a Supervising Social Worker was mentioned by all of the local authorities. In most cases, if the Staying Put carer was still looking after another child under the age of 18, they would still have access to the Supervising Social Worker. This led one local authority to say that, as the majority of their Staying Put carers have other children in placement, the costs of support aren’t huge, as that support would still be offered regardless. However, if a carer does not have another child in placement, it looks like the question of their access to support has a less positive answer (although one local authority did say that the Supervising Social Worker may continue to support the carer depending on their needs).

There was the suggestion from one local authority that Staying Put carers simply do not require the same level of support that they might have done when supporting a child aged 17 and under. It was also clear from the local authorities we spoke to that the priority was paying carers their fees and allowances; there is simply no additional funding for a support package.

### Training for Staying Put carers

In terms of training, some local authorities said that, as Staying Put carers are no longer foster carers (at least in terms of the relationship they have with the young person aged 18 and over in the Staying Put arrangement), training isn't so much of a priority. One local authority said it is not required because training courses like, 'Preparation for Adult Life' and 'Pathway Planning' are open to foster carers anyway.

However, one of the local authorities we spoke to questioned whether they gave enough support to the arrangement, for example, in helping former carers to set boundaries now they were living with a young adult. The challenges of supporting an 18-year-old can be new to carers.

*"I would also query whether we provide enough support around this, because obviously they become a tenant don't they technically, so there are sort of legal changes... we try to thrash it all out in the kind of agreement of what's acceptable, what's unacceptable, what's going to change. So, you know, is Tommy going to bring all his mates round and watch the football and they'll order beer on a Saturday afternoon? Because they wouldn't be doing that when he was [17], you know, the day before. What's going to change? Can he bring his girlfriend home? Can she stay overnight?"*

Local authority D

*"Not all foster carers are quite ready to take a young person of 18-years-old. They've got to change their ways of working I think sometimes and I think the next stage is identifying ways of educating foster carers and young people... I think already I'm identifying now areas and bits of work we could do with foster carers to allow them to understand what it's like living with an 18-year-old because it's slightly different to living with somebody who is 17 and in foster care: more freedom, more openness, the fact that young people can be allowed to make decisions and you've got less kind of control over them, if you like."*

Local authority C

The local authorities we spoke to also emphasised bespoke support for each carer, as opposed to a specific training package, stressing that the training needs of each Staying Put carer would be different depending on the specific needs of each young person. One local authority discussed how, rather than suggesting Staying Put carers attend pre-existing fostering training (as is possible with foster carers), staff often have to work to upskill the carer themselves, which, again, takes up staff time and capacity.

*"It's certainly nothing that I've ever come across, them asking for more training, and I'm not entirely sure how it works because they're all so different that when you're talking about supporting somebody who is going to university and supporting somebody who has got maybe a learning disability, it's very much about that individual support package ..."*

Local authority E

*"It can be quite difficult sometimes to predict exactly what each individual package of Staying Put needs, versus what you can actually offer to that placement."*

Local authority A

If the government is to revisit Staying Put guidance, as we urge, we would recommend that ways of supporting carers – and the type of training they might continue to benefit from as Staying Put carers – are explored, and their importance emphasised.

*"I think it's how the system was set up right from the get-go. That is where the disadvantage comes in. I think with foster carers, there are statutory expectations around the training that has to be met, in order for you to be annually reviewed and assessed as able to carry on in that fostering role. When you're 18, you're no longer considered fostered. So that whole fostering aspect, and the balances and checks that are in place, disappear. So what you effectively have, is, for want of a better word, almost like a private type arrangement, except that we are going in and offering some financial support. I think what would really need to change would be clarity, in terms of, if you're going to be a Staying Put carer, this is the training."*

Local authority A

*"I think there has to be training for people to understand the differences between being a foster carer and a Staying Put provider and the rules that govern foster care and the rules that govern a young person that's over 18 because I think there is a difference and I think there has to be a change in approach and I think that's something that actually, if we could incorporate that as part of the training, that would be really helpful."*

Local authority C

### The relationship between local authorities and IFAs

The majority of children in foster care are in local authority fostering places (65%), with the remainder (35%) placed through Independent Fostering Agencies or IFAs.<sup>84</sup> If local authorities do not have an 'in-house' carer available, or at least no carer who can best meet a child or young person's needs, they are able to approach an IFA.

The relationship between local authorities and IFAs can be an uneasy one. As Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers' independent review of fostering highlighted, there can be debate about local authorities placing children with their own 'in-house' carers first, as well as the differences in local authority and IFA costs.<sup>85</sup> This relationship can be put under further strain in negotiating Staying Put arrangements – and the issue of support (which is in itself intrinsically linked to money) is a big factor in this.

It is also worth noting that there is a gap in the proportion of young people in local authorities staying put compared with those in IFAs. Those choosing to stay put with IFA carers increased from last year by 2 percentage points to 42%, while those staying put with local authority carers remained at 58%.<sup>86</sup>

For the local authorities we spoke to, the specific difficulties around Staying Put focused on the 'agency fee' (local authorities pay IFAs fees to cover the costs of placements for children).

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
<b>Proportion of young people staying put overall<sup>y</sup></b>	1,570 (46%) <sup>87</sup>	1,695 (49%) <sup>88</sup>	1,885 (50%) <sup>89</sup>

<sup>y</sup> Figures in table taken from Ofsted, whose data can differ from the Department for Education's.

One local authority was adamant that IFAs will not be paid the agency fee once the young person turns 18; they will only receive the payment for the carer. Another stated that IFAs expect the local authority to continue to pay them the full fostering rate, including the administrative element and the Supervising Social Worker fees. In the local authority's opinion, once the young person has become a young adult and the placement has transitioned to a Staying Put arrangement, the level of support on offer – and subsequently the fee for that support – should change.

This same local authority expressed a preference for dealing with the carer directly, rather than continuing to go through the IFA, and consequently payments should also go direct to the carer, rather than through the IFA (this could be interpreted as bringing the carer 'in-house'). Both they and another local authority felt this course of action was not encouraged by IFAs, both because they wanted to keep the administrative agency fee, and because agencies do not want to lose the carer themselves for what could be three years, given the challenges around foster carer recruitment. There was some concern around what IFAs might be saying to their carers that could potentially put them off working more directly with the local authority.

Though IFAs might argue that the agency fee covers the support around the arrangement, like the help provided by Supervising Social Workers – which carers might formerly have depended on – as we have seen, support tends not to be prioritised when the available funding can only stretch so far.

A further complication is inconsistency: different local authorities will have different approaches, and IFAs will be dealing with a number of different local authorities. As we've explored, one local authority was firm in its position that the agency fee would no longer be paid; another had agreed it would pay independent agencies £75 a week to cover the

support and supervision element (although this will depend on whether the carer has other children in placement, too). A further local authority was clear that the same principles apply whether a carer is in-house or with an agency. However, the agency fee is likely to reduce, given the assumption that the support a carer may need will also reduce as the young adult gets older. Again, this particular local authority experienced difficulty, with some IFAs prepared to reduce their fee more than others.

*"I think the complication is that not every local authority has the same policy in place. And obviously with IFA carers you may get an IFA carer that has a young person from [different local authorities] and it could be that when they turn 18, they could all have the same birthday and when they turn 18 they could all be entitled to different packages of support which I think is something that needs to be looked at as well because actually, we probably need a consistent approach across the board."*

Local authority C

Attempts to address these challenges have been made. The Fostering Network's Staying Put guidance refers to the Staying Put protocol drawn up by the IFAs and local authorities of the South Central Framework as an example of best practice.<sup>90</sup> This protocol outlines Staying Put arrangements for young people in IFA placements, and states that arrangements for Staying Put with IFA carers will be discussed and agreed between the authority and IFA. It is clear that direct approaches to and arrangements with IFA carers should not be made by local authorities. Recognising and including Staying Put within fostering commissioning frameworks, through a protocol like this, for example, could be a way forward.

*"It could be a challenge in the future to try and reduce some of those [IFA] payments in line with the local authority carer but again, at the same time you*

*don't want to jeopardise a stable placement because you're trying to negotiate a lower rate. So, that's the challenge that we could have potentially going forward and if we could find some kind of planning place where there's almost agreement in advance of what the payments will be and people can get time to adjust to them going forward, that would be quite helpful."*

Local authority C

The government's Staying Put guidance mentions IFAs only once, and no advice is given on navigating a Staying Put arrangement if the carer involved is with an IFA. This has to be addressed. Inconsistencies of approach are unhelpful and confusing, and what is best for the young people placed with IFA carers must be at the centre of any approach taken.

## Recruitment of carers

It is often said there is a critical shortage of foster carers.<sup>91</sup> Last year, taking into account such factors as the percentage of the foster care workforce leaving each year and the change in the numbers of children in care, The Fostering Network estimated the shortfall in England to be about 7,220.<sup>92</sup> Although more carers are certainly needed, the shortages are more down to the fact carers with the right experience and expertise may not be available in the geographical area where children with particular needs could be placed with them.<sup>93</sup> Regardless, recruitment tends to be an urgent concern for both local authorities and IFAs.

As the local authorities we spoke to highlighted, Staying Put arrangements inevitably block a potential placement for a younger child (if the carer is planning on continuing to foster). Compensating for foster placements that have transitioned into Staying Put arrangements was clearly a worry for local authorities.

There was particular concern around recruiting carers skilled in looking after teenagers. This is especially pertinent considering the largest age group of children in care are aged 10 to 15, making up 39% of all children in care.<sup>94</sup> The second largest (24%) are aged 16 and over.<sup>95</sup> Over the last five years, the average age of children in care has been increasing steadily.<sup>96</sup>

As a result, particularly valuable placements are being lost through Staying Put, because you are losing carers who look after teenagers, and these carers are difficult to recruit. One local authority said that as it is such a challenge to recruit carers specialising in supporting teenagers, the proportion of teenagers being fostered – and so who will be eligible for Staying Put when they turn 18 – will inevitably decrease.

We would urge the Department for Education to consider the impact of Staying Put on fostering capacity, and to think particularly about how carers specialising in supporting teenagers can be recruited into the workforce.

*"I guess the concern for me is that foster carers for teenagers... By nature of Staying Put, where we're moving people from that pool because they've done a good job and so, while it's brilliant for the individual, it's not necessarily brilliant for the next lot of individuals, you know, and you could really do with some sort of committed resources to recruit [foster carers for teenagers] with a view to them doing it longer term... And for us because we're not getting placements for young people, you know, there's 16 and 17-year-olds now, there is a crisis of carers and that worries me... I just worry how it will pan out in terms of going forward because if we haven't got the carers for the young people in the first place then we can't have the Staying Put providers, can we?"*

Local authority E

## Placement inequality

As this report has explored, Staying Put gives young people in foster care the opportunity to stay at home, to benefit from the stability and safety their foster carers offer a while longer, and to transition into independence when they feel more prepared.

But the key part of that sentence is, ‘young people in foster care’. It is not an opportunity that all care experienced young people can take advantage of. Young people in residential care or in supported accommodation simply do not have that option.

*“You can stay here until you’re 21,’ is not a message that other young people get.”*

Local authority B

One local authority spoke about their supported accommodation initiative. The idea behind this is a nine-month transition into independent living. Although the pathway offers a good level of support to the young people, the stability and promise that Staying Put delivers on is not provided. Often, the young people may not be ready for the transition, but the expectation – which they are made aware of – is that they will need to move into independence after nine months.

On the other hand, they have been able to apply the philosophy of Staying Put to another of their Supported Lodgings schemes. Originally set up for 16 and 17-year-olds, it now serves young people up to the age of 21.

*“However, we’ve taken on the principle that it would be ridiculous to be throwing somebody out of a Supported Lodgings arrangement when they could stay in a fostering one. So we keep young people there as long as they need to up to the age of 21.”*

Local authority B

It is welcome that the government has made a commitment to introduce Staying Close for young people leaving residential care, which will enable young people to live independently once they turn 18, but, importantly, in a location close to their children’s home with ongoing support from that children’s home.<sup>97</sup> The government has been piloting variations of this scheme through the Innovation Programme. During Care Leavers Week 2019, the government also announced the wider roll-out of Staying Close. Funding for the eight existing pilots, worth £2 million a year, will continue over 2020 to 2021, with £6 million then being provided to support the extension of the scheme.<sup>98</sup> An evaluation of the pilots was due in March 2020 but this was delayed, no doubt due to the impact of the pandemic.<sup>99</sup>

Yet Staying Close is still not on a statutory footing, which will make it even more vulnerable than Staying Put to the challenging economic climate local authorities now find themselves operating in.

Further, those young people who are turning 18 in supported lodgings are also at a massive disadvantage. The government must consider how to equalise their offer to those young people too. The Department for Education’s current focus on reforms to unregulated provision, with a recent consultation closing in June 2020, offers an excellent opportunity to address the placement inequality that currently exists between children in care.

The government’s promised Care Review is an opportunity to explore the implementation of Staying Put – and how delivery of the scheme can be improved – but also the different experiences of care leavers, particularly those who might be turning 18 in children’s homes and in supported accommodation, and what might help them.

*“I just see it as more... as much resources as possible – diverse resource – different resource to serve the needs of each young person and I think that’s the key behind all this, let’s find different ways and different people that can support these young people because you will get better outcomes.”*

Local authority C

## Shared Lives

Every care leaver should be able to benefit from the level of support and type of accommodation post-18 that best suits their needs and their preferences.

We have seen how the type of placement a young person is in can determine what support they might get post-18.

But even if a young person turns 18 in foster care, there can be complications around the Staying Put offer. If the young person has more complex needs, it’s not always clear whether that pathway is actually what’s best for them.

The local authorities we spoke to shared the difficulties they can experience in deciding whether the young person should move into a Staying Put arrangement or a Shared Lives scheme. Shared Lives schemes support adults with learning disabilities, mental health problems or other needs that make it difficult for them to live independently.<sup>100</sup> The schemes, registered with the Care Quality Commission, match someone who needs care with an approved carer.<sup>101</sup> They are also known as adult placements.<sup>102</sup>

A Shared Lives scheme may be more appropriate than Staying Put for a young person who has complex needs. If young people have additional needs, they need to have the right network of support around them, and Shared Lives – with its links to adult social care – may deliver this more comprehensively. Shared Lives schemes can also continue for a long period of time, unlike Staying

Put, which comes to an end when the young person turns 21.

However, there are different payments and expectations for Staying Put and Shared Lives carers, with Shared Lives schemes subject to more regulation. Foster carers do not always want to sign up as a Shared Lives carer. Working with adult social care can bring complications with it as well, particularly with funding being an issue across adult and children’s services. There can be a ‘bureaucratic mismatch’ (in the words of one local authority) between the requirements of fostering and Shared Lives: in one case, twins who had disabilities and who had shared a room as children were moving into a Shared Lives scheme, but adult social care services were saying that they each had to have their own room. Another local authority also mentioned concerns that the thresholds for accessing adult social care are rising.

*“We have some difficulties as well sorting out whether it should be Staying Put or Shared Lives as well and that can be quite complicated because of, different payments, different expectations because there’s more regulation in terms of Shared Lives than there is with Staying Put. So, for example, we now have somebody who should be on Shared Lives, but carers are wanting to be on Staying Put because they don’t want to go on dementia training, for example because [there are] some compulsory training requirements as part of the Shared Lives process. So, that’s an added complication.”*

Local authority C

*“The criteria for Staying Put, the criteria for Shared Lives and the criteria for supported lodgings are all different. And there needs to be, there needs to be flexibility because it feels as if the tail’s wagging the dog and you’ve got a young person who has to then fit into somebody else’s criteria.”*

Local authority D

Government guidance states that where young people have an ongoing cognitive disability and meet the adult services Fair Access to Care Services criteria, foster placements should be converted into Shared Lives arrangements once the young person turns 18. It is emphasised that this is important to ensure that both the young person and the carer have a formal regulatory and safeguarding framework that addresses their respective needs.

However, it is clear that local authorities are experiencing difficulties with converting placements to Shared Lives arrangements, and if the government is to update its guidance on Staying Put as we urge, we would recommend that more detail is provided on navigating the transition to a Shared Lives arrangement.

Positively, one local authority said that since they had invested in their Staying Put and Supported Lodgings Coordinator, working with adult social care had become easier.

*“And again, that’s something that I think was unseen when I first started and it’s work I’m doing with the Shared Lives team to try and make sure that transition and that transfer over is much smoother.”*

Local authority C

### Can we be even more ambitious? Staying Put up to 25

It is crucial that young people feel ready to move out when the time eventually comes. And for some, 21 might be too early.

The local authorities we spoke to did express some concern about the idea of extending Staying Put up to 25, for example, as other forms of support for care leavers go up to. There was a worry that extending to 25 may undermine the importance of the message that young people should be supported into independence through Staying Put.

*“I would think if somebody is needing sort of a Staying Put arrangement past 21, my query, one of my thoughts would be what’s been happening during that placement, has the necessary progress been made in terms of a young person progressing towards independence?”*

Local authority C

Further, as those other forms of support – for example, the right to a Personal Adviser or Leaving Care Worker – do go up to 25, care leavers moving into their own place at 21 will continue to be supported in some way, as they might not be at the age of 25. Funding is, of course, another consideration.

*“But equally you’ve got a four-year period afterwards when they’ve still got support. Whereas when our service ended at 21 and Staying Put ended at 21 it felt like we’d kind of just moved that cliff edge.”*

Local authority E

*“Obviously we have the timeframe of up to 21 years because we don’t have an indefinite pot of money, but that’s a concern in itself, because we should have sufficient money to support our more vulnerable young adults who can’t achieve full independence at 21, 22 or 23.”*

Local authority A

However, local authorities stated that it is crucial to be open to possible extensions of the Staying Put arrangement beyond 21, if that is what is right for the young people, and if it will give their transition into independence a much higher chance of success. That extension should be open to all young people in Staying Put.

*“But we’re also looking at how flexible, I suppose, we can be, because when you have, like, the age limit’s 18 to 21, you’re almost working on the assumption that a 21-year-old young adult will be ready to take flight. That’s not always the case.”*

Local authority A

*“What we’d agreed was that if they were doing the final exams in the term that they turn 21 that we would extend to the end of that term because what you were finding was that young people were hitting their 21st birthday in their third year of uni and if that was... over that exam period that was putting unnecessary pressure on so... we would extend it to the end of that term.”*

Local authority E

**Policy has to be led by and tailored to the needs of young people who are care experienced. Care leavers – whatever type of placement they left at 18, and whatever their needs might be – must have the same confidence in their corporate parent and firm foundation of support that we would want and expect all young people to have in their parents and wider family.**

*“It’s about affording them the same opportunity that another young person would have if they were still within their family home.”*

Local authority A

## Recommendations

We urge the government to:

5. Update the guidance around Staying Put, specifically to:
  - a. highlight the importance of the Staying Put Coordinator role, and the difference investment in such a role can make to address the staffing pressures Staying Put can create;
  - b. explore possible ways of supporting carers – and the type of training they might continue to benefit from as Staying Put carers – emphasising the importance of this;
  - c. address inconsistencies of approach when it comes to setting up Staying Put arrangements with Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) carers;
  - d. provide more detail on navigating the transition to a shared lives arrangement.
6. Publish the evaluation of the Staying Close pilots as soon as possible, and act to put Staying Close on a statutory footing at the earliest opportunity.
7. Consider how to improve its offer to young people turning 18 in supported accommodation, as part of proposed reforms to unregulated accommodation.
8. Explore the implementation of Staying Put, and the different experiences of young care leavers, as part of its upcoming Care Review.

# Conclusion

The difference Staying Put can make is clear.

Young people have more time to prepare for moving out and living independently, benefiting from the support and stability their former carers can offer them a while longer. This can really help with young people's ability to engage with education.

And such support is crucial during the coronavirus pandemic, with youth unemployment soaring, increased pressures on local authorities and so much uncertainty for so many.

But the future of the funding of Staying Put is unclear. We urge the government to consider the options this report sets out and provide assurances that Staying Put will continue to be funded.

The government's commitment to the Care Review is promising, but it is essential that the very different experiences care leavers have are explored and addressed. It presents us with a vital opportunity to review the implementation of Staying Put over the last six years and, crucially, how young people who were living in children's

homes, or in supported accommodation, before they then left care, have fared.

The Staying Close pilots – which give young people leaving residential care the opportunity to live independently in a location close to their children's home with ongoing support from that children's home – are a welcome initiative, but as Staying Close is not yet on a statutory footing, the scheme is even more vulnerable to the difficult economic climate local authorities are now navigating.<sup>103</sup> Young people turning 18 in supported accommodation don't tend to have the potential certainty and security that young people turning 18 in foster care do, and this needs to be addressed.

In this way, we can give young care leavers the foundations they need to thrive, and go one step further toward ending childhood crisis in these unprecedented times.



# Methodology

Action for Children commissioned researcher Graham Stark at Virtual Worlds Research to build a computer simulation model that would enable us to cost various different funding options for Staying Put at a national, regional and local authority level over the next five years. This model has been published on the GitHub code sharing site, and is written in the Julia programming language (as this language is designed to be read by non-specialists it should be possible to refer directly to the source code).

## Key data sources used included:

- The Ofsted 'Fostering in England' series (for baseline figures on numbers of carers and young people, as well as to make imputations of foster carer skill levels, for example).<sup>104</sup> Ofsted data for 2017/18 is used, as modelling was undertaken before data for 2018/19 was released.
- The Department for Education 'Looked after children' series, specifically the 'Underlying Data' series which has the most detail available on numbers on the Staying Put scheme by local authority and age.<sup>105</sup> This is used for entry and exit rates for the scheme, and optionally for some baseline numbers of young people on the scheme, as Ofsted and Department for Education figures are not always consistent with each other, even when referring to the same year. (It should be stated here that the 'Underlying Data' for young people Staying Put differs from the 'Headline Data', with 'Underlying Data' tending to show lower numbers. For example, the 'Underlying Data' for 2018/19 indicates that 1,970 18-year-olds in England were in Staying Put arrangements, contrasting with the 'Headline Data' for 2018/19, which shows there were 2,120 18-year-olds Staying Put. We have used 'Underlying Data' for the model, as it has the most detail available, for example, breakdowns by local authority for Staying Put numbers are given, and this is not the case for 'Headline Data'. However, 'Headline Data' is used

in the body of the report as it is these figures that tend to be used publicly by the Department for Education and others.)

- The Fostering Network's 2017 survey of local authorities in England. The Fostering Network kindly gave us access to the underlying database of this survey, which we use here for information on how each local authority approaches payments for Staying Put carers.

Data on grants to local authorities, local housing allowance levels, minimum wage rates, benefit rates, projected inflation and recommended minimum fostering allowances were also used. It should be noted that local authority overhead costs are not taken into account here.

Virtual World's modelling strategy involved:

- Constructing a synthetic dataset showing estimates of the numbers of young people on the Staying Put scheme by age, and the number of carers by skill level. Each carer and young person was modelled as an individual. The constructed data is based on data from Ofsted and the Department for Education (see above) on the numbers of children in care, and the number of young people entering and exiting Staying Put arrangements. It is important to note that the modelled population can differ from the actual recorded numbers of young people who are in Staying Put arrangements, as the numbers in each local authority are small and can vary

randomly from year to year.

- The researcher then wrote code which applied rules for payments to the carer and contributions from the young person in the synthetic datasets. Such rules were either the researcher's interpretation of each local authority's approach from The Fostering Network's survey or one of Action for Children's proposed funding options (see below for more information).

A number of assumptions were made for this to work.

As not all young people take up Staying Put, and those that do may only remain in the arrangement for a year or two, the researcher applied local authority rates for entering into a Staying Put arrangement and then remaining with former foster carers. In this way, the model's synthetic population of young people are 'aged' through the system for three years, with a proportion dropping out each year.

Each year, each young person is randomly assigned to education, employment or not in education, employment or training (NEET), according to frequencies taken from the Department for Education dataset. For those who are NEET, Housing Benefit is assigned based on the latest category A Local Housing Allowance, as well as £57.90 in Income Support/Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). For those assumed to be in work or training, a national minimum wage of £6.15 per hour is imputed.

For carers, in the absence of relevant information, one carer per one young person is assumed. Some payment schemes have fees that vary with skill levels. Skills across five levels are therefore imputed, using Ofsted data on the numbers of carers approved for different types of care at the national level. Carers are then randomly assigned to these levels.

In regards payments, within the modelling of the current system, using The Fostering Network's 2017 local authority survey data, no fee and no contribution from the young person is assumed unless explicitly stated. Reformed systems (for the different funding options set out in Chapter 3) are modelled by overriding parts of the modelled existing system.

All numbers produced as included in Chapter 3 are in 'nominal terms': projected actual cash payments, with fees, allowances and other amounts increased each year in line with forecast Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation using Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) projections.

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