

# Staying Close 2023-25

**Application guide for Local Authorities** 

January 2023

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# **Executive summary**

Staying Close is a model which provides an enhanced support package for young people leaving care from children's homes and is designed to be a comparable offer to the option to Stay Put, which supports young people in foster care to remain with their former foster carers until age 21. Staying Close provides an offer of move-on accommodation, alongside a package of practical and emotional support, provided by a member of staff from their former children's home or from someone who they know and trust. These bespoke packages of support help develop their confidence and skills for independent living, and for their emotional health and wellbeing.

In 2017-18, Staying Close was piloted by 5 Local Authorities (LAs) and 3 private providers. An additional 15 LAs were funded in 2022-23. The Department for Education (DfE) is now looking to increase the number of LAs with a Staying Close offer over the next two years. Our ambition is for:

Staying Close to be offered to as many young people as possible.

More LAs, over a wider geographical spread, to have a Staying Close offer.

Staying Close to be a recognised model of good practice that can be embedded into policy and practice and seen as an invest to save opportunity by delivering wider positive outcomes for young people leaving children's residential homes.

Each Staying Close offer should deliver the following benefits for young people leaving care from children's homes:

<u>Accommodation stability</u>: including access to improved housing options, reduced rates of evictions and fewer placement moves.

<u>Wellbeing:</u> positive changes in both mental and physical health and reductions in antisocial behaviour, episodes of going missing and criminal activity for young people at risk of these behaviours.

<u>Education</u>, <u>Employment and Training (EET)</u>: increasing numbers of young people in EET, including through support gaining work experience, with application forms and advice and guidance.

<u>Strong relationships and support network</u>: an increase in social connectedness and developing healthy relationships.

<u>Independent living skills:</u> including improvements in cooking, budgeting, time management and practical skills.

LAs that are not already delivering Staying Close will be able to bid for funding within an indicative range of £22,000 to £32,000 per care leaver to deliver the programme in financial years 2023-25.

# **Evaluation by What Works for Early Intervention and Children's Social Care**

In 2023-25, DfE will be partnering with What Works for Early Intervention and Children's Social Care (WWEICSC) to incorporate an evaluation as part of the roll-out of Staying Close. The evaluation will inform ongoing roll out of Staying Close and strengthen the Staying Close model as the number of LAs offering Staying Close grows. When parliamentary time allows, we will be bringing forward legislation for Staying Close to be a national entitlement and for Staying Close to support young people up to age 23, recognising that young people in the general population are leaving home at older ages.

WWEICSC's evaluation will take the form of a Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT). This means that whether or not applying LAs (whose bids pass an initial DfE assessment) are selected to receive funding to deliver Staying Close will be decided at random. RCTs are the best way for evaluators to find out which programme models bring about the most positive impact for recipients.

Only new LAs that are not already delivering Staying Close will be able to bid for funding in this bidding round. This is because our ambition is for Staying Close to be offered to as many young people as possible and for more LAs, over a wider geographical spread, to have a Staying Close offer.

Further information about the evaluation and the RCT can be found below and at Annex A.

# What is Staying Close

#### **Background**

Many care leavers report experiencing a 'cliff-edge' when they leave care and move into semi-independent accommodation or an independent tenancy. They report not feeling equipped to deal with the challenges of living independently and as a result, many care leavers get into debt and arrears and lose their tenancies.

Also, many young people leaving care do not have strong support networks to help them with the transition to independent living. As a result, care leavers are particularly at risk of homelessness due to a lack of transitional and practical support, and a lack of suitable accommodation.

Staying Close is not simply a housing offer. It is a model which provides an enhanced support package for young people leaving care from children's homes and is designed to be a comparable offer to the option to Stay Put, which supports young people in foster care to remain with their former foster carers until age 21. Staying Close provides an offer of move-on accommodation, alongside a package of practical and emotional support, provided by a member of staff from their former children's home or from someone who they know and trust. These bespoke packages of support help develop their confidence and skills for independent living, and for their emotional health and wellbeing.

<u>Independent evaluations</u> have shown positive outcomes for young people involved in Staying Close, including reduced eviction rates, increased engagement in education, employment or training (EET) and improved wellbeing and relationship management skills.

The Staying Close Handbook provides case studies from the pilot programmes and sets out the insights and experiences of each of the pilots, the details of their offer and what they learned while designing and delivering it. LA and provider views on Staying Close can also be found in the <u>evaluation reports</u> on existing providers.

# **Staying Close framework**

The Staying Close framework (figure 1) was developed with pilot providers and sets out what should form part of a Staying Close model. The diagram puts a trusting relationship and safe and secure accommodation at the core of a Staying Close offer and should be the **minimum** offer of support to care leavers.

New LA providers are expected to utilise this framework to support a local adaptation of Staying Close for their young people leaving care. The framework

should reflect the local social care and housing provider landscape, and the needs and vulnerabilities of their residential care leavers, which are often very different.

Phase 3 of the Staying Close programme will allow LAs to determine which cohorts of young people in their area may benefit from for Staying Close funding, this may extend to children who have not previously lived in residential care, although LAs should prioritise children leaving residential care where this is possible. LAs proposing to support wider cohort of young people through Staying Close are also expected to utilise the Staying Close framework to support a local adaptation of the programme for their young people leaving care.

The Staying Close Handbook sets out how the pilot programmes embedded the Staying Close model in their Staying Close offer. The Handbook can be requested by emailing Staying.CLOSE@education.gov.uk

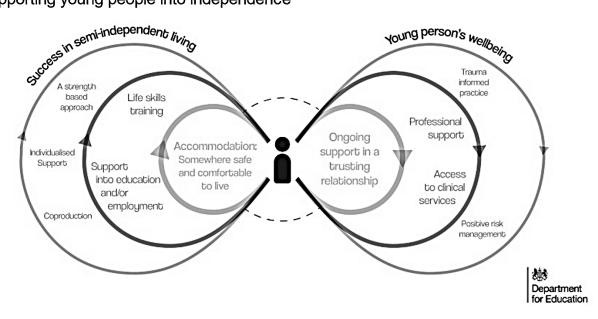
Figure 1. Staying Close - Supporting young people into independence

# Staying Close Supporting young people into independence









# **Funding and eligibility**

#### **Available funding**

DfE has announced £36m of funding for Staying Close over the next three years; £6m in 2022-23, £15m in 2023-24 and £15m in 2024-25.

This bidding round is for LAs (not already delivering Staying Close) to apply for grant funding to establish and deliver a Staying Close offer in their locality for the next two years (2023-25). Bidders will need to submit a programme plan for 2 years.

## Who is eligible to apply for grant funding?

LAs that are not already delivering Staying Close can apply for grant funding and must be the lead point of contact, responsible for the grant funding and reporting requirements.

Private children's homes providers, charities and other voluntary organisations are not able to apply for this grant funding, but we would encourage all interested parties to work with their LAs to ensure the strongest Staying Close offer possible.

#### How can LAs use their funding?

Previously, Staying Close funding has only been made available for children leaving residential care. However, phase 3 of the Staying Close programme will allow LAs to determine their own use for Staying Close funding, which may extend to children who previously may not have benefited from the funding. This includes, but is not limited to young people (including Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children) living in:

- Semi-independent, transitional accommodation (like a supported hostel, trainer flats);
- Self-contained accommodation with specialist personal assistance support (for example, young people with disabilities, pregnant young women and single parents);
- Self-contained accommodation with floating support;
- Supported lodgings, where adult(s) in the "host family" provide formal advice and support;
- Bed and breakfast or emergency accommodation (like a night shelter, direct access or emergency hostel due to lack of available registered accommodation);
- In custody.

Despite this new expansion, LAs should prioritise children leaving residential care where this is possible.

Each Staying Close offer will be established and delivered by LAs to meet the needs of their young people and their locality, and to deliver the benefits set out above (accommodation stability; wellbeing; EET; strong relationships and support network; independent living skills).

As part of their application, LAs are expected to provide a detailed breakdown of costs, based on an indicative cost per young person of £22,000-£32,000. This range is based on average costs from the pilot programmes using a range of estimates for running total costs in 2020-21.

LAs can allocate their grant funding to support costs related to staffing capacity, expertise, resources, and the ongoing delivery of their Staying Close offer. Funding cannot be used for capital costs.

## How will the funding be allocated?

Funding will be allocated via Section 31 grants to LAs that pass an initial DfE assessment and are then selected at random through the RCT. These LAs will sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) setting out data sharing and reporting requirements. All LAs bidding for funding must agree to the data sharing commitment at the declaration element of the application form prior to submitting.

#### What is in/out of scope?

This funding is only available to LAs that are not already delivering Staying Close. Any bid from a private or charity provider will automatically be deemed out of scope. However, we would encourage all interested parties to work with their LAs to ensure the strongest Staying Close offer possible. LAs may partner up and work alongside charity or private providers to deliver services. This may include, but is not limited to, using private or charity staff to deliver the programme, who are funded by the LA.

We are attempting to be as accommodating as possible in this funding round and so will impose minimal limits on bids. The following can be taken as general guidelines:

#### Projects will be considered:

- Where, as set out above, the LA can identify care leavers who currently have no support and are currently in / or were in a children's home.
- Where they look to support young people leaving care arrangements that might not be classed / registered as children's homes (semi supported accommodation / custodial accommodation / UASC, for example). All bids will need to demonstrate that their proposed cohort has been in the care of the LA and how this cohort will benefit from Staying Close.

- Of any size and cost, as long as the indicative range per care leaver is adhered to and the LA understands they may not receive all the funding they bid for.
- From a region where provision already exists, however, we encourage bids from regions with minimal or no current provision.
- Launched in partnership with private and or charity providers. The LA must remain the lead throughout the programme.

#### Projects cannot be:

- Only new LAs that are not already delivering Staying Close will be able to bid for funding in this bidding round. This is because our ambition is for Staying Close to be offered to as many young people as possible and for more LAs, over a wider geographical spread, to have a Staying Close offer.
- Used for Capital works to establish provision. This is specifically for programme funding to cover staffing / revenue costs.
- We are not seeking LA consortium bids at this time.

#### Limitations to funding allocation and funding distribution

Funding is limited and where the number of successful applications exceeds the total amount of funding available the amount awarded to an individual LA may be less than the total value applied for through the application process. In addition, not all LAs that pass DfE's assessment of applications will receive funding due to the RCT being conducted by WWEICSC. DfE will also make decisions about the amounts to be awarded that enables more LAs, over a wider geographical spread, to have a Staying Close offer.

Breakdown of costs will be reviewed but not assessed. Any applications that exceed the maximum indicative cost per young person will automatically be deemed unsuccessful.

## Assessing the application

#### **DfE scoring and evaluation**

Applications received will be evaluated by an assessment panel within DfE and will be assessed using a five-point scale for each relevant question.

- Score of 0: Does not meet the requirement Does not comply and/or
  insufficient information provided to demonstrate that the Bidder has the
  understanding and skills required to provide the services, with little or no evidence
  to support the response.
- Score of 1: Major reservations Considerable reservations of the Bidder's understanding and skills/capability required to provide the services, with little or no evidence to support the response.
- Score of 2: Minor reservations Some minor reservations of the Bidder's understanding and skills/capability required to provide the services, with little or no evidence to support the response.
- Score of 3: Satisfies the requirement Demonstration in the Bid of the understanding and skills/capability required to provide the services, with evidence to support the response.
- Score of 4: Satisfies the requirement with minor additional benefits Above average demonstration in the Bid of the understanding and skills/capability required to provide the services. Response identifies factors that will offer potential added value, with evidence to support the response.
- Score of 5: Exceeds the requirement Exceptional demonstration in the
  proposal of the understanding and skills/capability required to provide the services.
  Response identifies factors that will offer potential added value, with evidence to
  support the response.

Bids that score less than 3 on any single question, or that exceed the maximum indicative cost per young person will automatically be deemed unsuccessful. All those bids that receive a score of 3 for all questions, or above, will be put forward to WWEICSC for participation in the RCT.

DfE will provide formal feedback on all bids to identify where LAs could improve their application drafting and/or Staying Close offer for young people.

# Randomised Controlled Trial and Evaluation by What Works Centre for Early Intervention and Children's Social Care

Bids that pass DfE's assessment will be passed onto WWEICSC. WWEICSC will be conducting an evaluation of Staying Close in 2023-25 and will use a Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) to test the effectiveness of Staying Close as a model for delivery.

This will involve data collection (including implementing surveys for young people) in LAs in both the treatment and control group.

The evaluation will inform ongoing roll out of Staying Close. LAs will be expected to engage with this evaluation and to support the work of WWEICSC. The evaluation will not be an assessment or judgement of an individual LA's capability and it is purely to assess the strengths of the Staying Close programme. In order to generate valuable evidence for the programme, it is vital that all LAs (whether they are assigned to the treatment or control) continue to engage in the evaluation for its duration. We will be requesting the LAs commitment to this important piece of work via a declaration at the end of the application form.

Applications which pass the minimum threshold will be included in a randomised selection process to determine which LAs will receive funding. Roughly half of LAs will be assigned to receive Staying Close funding (the 'treatment' group) with other LAs assigned to 'control' and continuing to deliver business-as-usual support for young people. The 'control' group will not receive funding for the programme, however other incentives will be available as set out below.

Once the bid passes the initial assessment, the determination of groups will not be reflective of the quality of bid. Therefore, a bid scoring 3 in the evaluation stage may receive funding in the treatment group, whereas a bid scoring 5 may be placed in the control group.

WWEICSC has provided a compensatory package for those LAs in the control group, see details below.

While the allocation process is random, WWEICSC may include parameters in the selection to ensure that the treatment and control groups are as similar as possible. The total number of young people in the treatment and control groups for example will be roughly equal, and selection will also be informed by DfE's budget for the programme. Details will be finalised in the coming weeks, but other variables which may be 'balanced' between the groups include:

- Urban and rural LAs;
- Rate of Free School Meals in the LA;
- Rates of homelessness in the LA;
- Education, employment and training (EET) rates within the LA.

However, it should be noted that these should not substantially advantage or disadvantage individual LAs in the assignment process. Further explanation about the RCT can be found in the guide produced by WWEICSC at Annex A.

#### The 'treatment' group

The treatment group will receive funding for Staying Close and will also be required to send data to WWEICSC for the evaluation. Data collection will involve monitoring of young peoples' outcomes, such as episodes of homelessness, NEET status and changes in accommodation. It will also include implementing surveys with young people twice during the project to capture outcomes including subjective wellbeing and strength of relationships.

#### The 'control' group offer

The control group will **not** receive funding for Staying Close but, instead, will receive compensatory training packages for staff and a financial reimbursement for time spent collecting and preparing data for the WWEICSC evaluation. This compensatory package amounts to the following:

- LAs will receive a flat £2,000 payment to contribute to staff time involved in the evaluation.
- WWEICSC will offer half-day Theory of Change workshops for LA Leaving Care teams. Practitioners and managers report finding this really helpful in understanding their intervention / programme better and how it could be refined or improved.
- WWEICSC will offer Readiness to Trial training where LAs can learn more about evaluation and how it can be embedded in their work to improve delivery.
- WWEICSC researchers will work with LAs to conduct benchmarking analyses for their Leaving Care teams (e.g. NEET rates, homelessness, CAHMS).
- WWEICSC will provide support to LAs to co-design their surveys for young people to include measures which might be of particular interest to them.

#### Working with the DfE

Successful LAs will be invited to join a community of practice alongside the pilot providers. The group will share learning and provide support and insight to all LAs as Staying Close becomes available more widely. This will include a start-up meeting in April 2023.

LAs will be required to submit a quarterly report to DfE, setting out progress against delivery plans and data to support the ongoing evaluation and impact of their offer. A reporting template will be provided.

# **Application process**

## How to apply

The application period will open from 27 January 2023 and will close at 23:59 on 22 February 2023.

Estimated key dates and milestones for the application process are set out in the table below.

Milestones	Dates
Application window opens	27 January 2023
Application window closes	22 February 2023
Webinars delivered by DfE and WWEICSC for LAs on the application process, Randomised Controlled Trial and evaluation process	23 and 30 January 2023
Assessment of applications	February/March 2023
LAs notified of decisions and funding allocations confirmed	March 2023
Grant letters signed by LAs	March 2023
LA providers commence delivery	1 April 2023

## **Completing your application**

Please complete the accompanying application form available here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-close-funding-application-guide

Further information and prompts have been provided to help you complete it. Some sections will require accompanying text to support your response and have stated word limits. Please ensure that you adhere to these, as your response beyond the word limit will not be considered. Please include the total number of words for each section at the bottom of each text box.

All sections are mandatory and must be completed for your application to be accepted.

Additional materials from the pilot projects are available to support your application:

Staying Close: expression of interest - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

The Staying Close Handbook – the handbook shares the insights and experiences of each of the pilots, the details of their offer and what they learned while designing and delivering it. It sets out a framework for organisations hoping to develop a Staying Close offer for the young people leaving care in their locality.

The Strategic Triangle to assess your readiness to implement Staying Close - the main purposes of the strategic triangle are to help you both diagnose your environments to spot the opportunities for creating value (either by avoiding a harm or advancing a good), and to design and test in your mind particular actions you can imagine taking that would exploit the opportunity. In this sense, it is an opportunity spotting and planning tool. It can also be converted into a tool for monitoring progress as one goes along and adapting as circumstances change<sup>1</sup>.

Both resources are available upon request by emailing <a href="mailto:Staying.CLOSE@education.gov.uk">Staying.CLOSE@education.gov.uk</a>

#### **Submitting your application**

Please email a single Word or PDF version of your completed application to <a href="mailto:Staying.CLOSE@education.gov.uk">Staying.CLOSE@education.gov.uk</a> DfE must receive all completed applications by email by the deadline 23:59 on 22 February 2023 and will not be able to consider applications that miss this deadline.

Your 'LA name' followed by 'Staying Close EOI' should be included in the email 'subject' field when submitting your application.

When you have sent the DfE your application form, you will receive an email response letting you know that your application has been received.

#### **Selection process**

As above, applications received will be evaluated by an assessment panel within DfE and will be assessed using a five-point scale for each relevant question.

Bids that score less than 3 on any single question, or that exceed the maximum indicative cost per young person will automatically be deemed unsuccessful. All those

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> <u>Creating Public Value: The Core Idea of Strategic Management in Government | International Journal of Professional Business Review (openaccessojs.com)</u>

bids that receive a score of 3 or above for all questions will be put forward to WWEICSC for participation in the RCT.

## **Application outcome**

The named LA contact from each application will be notified of the outcome of their application by email.

## **Drawing of funding**

Grant payments to the successful LAs will be made through Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003. An MoU will be issued to successful LAs on award. Grants will be paid in approximately July and November 2023 and then at the same point in subsequent financial years.

# Annex A: What Works Centre for Early Intervention and Children's Social Care Guidance for Local Authorities

## **Staying Close: Local Authority Evaluation Guide**

DfE is partnering with What Works for Early Intervention and Children's Social Care (WWEICSC) to incorporate an exciting evaluation as part of the roll-out of Staying Close in 2023-24. In this guidance we'll tell you a little about what this involves for participating LAs, how we'll work together and the benefits this research will bring to care leavers in this country.

#### Who we are

WWEICSC seeks to improve the lives of children and families through generating the best evidence into what interventions and programmes are best for children and families. This means running research projects (like this one) to understand which programmes work best, how and for whom.

#### Why we evaluate

DfE is considering making Staying Close statutory so that it can make a positive difference for children and young people for many years to come. For this to happen, we need to be able to demonstrate with robust evidence that the programme works in the way it is intended to so that HM Treasury (HMT) can be confident that they are spending public funds effectively. That evidence is what this programme is designed to achieve.

Finding out how the programme works is also an ethical issue: if Staying Close is to be delivered to young people in England for years to come, it's vital that it works as well as it can for them. Evaluations can generate important insights (such as particularly effective activities within the programme, or common barriers which limit effectiveness) which can refine and improve the programme.

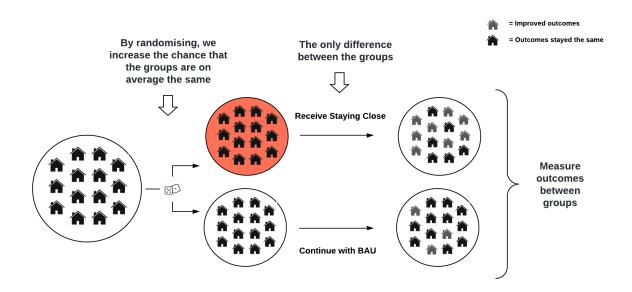
Similarly, some interventions that looked promising at first have been shown to be harmful when evaluated (e.g. <u>Scared Straight</u> and <u>Cambridge Somerville study</u>). Many more have shown no or lacklustre effects. The programme will arm LAs across the country with valuable insights and the knowledge that young people years into the future are being given the best chance possible to succeed.

DfE's phased roll-out of Staying Close provides us with an exciting opportunity to generate this valuable knowledge without limiting the number of young people Staying Close is being delivered to. DfE's plan was always to provide funding to around 25 LAs in 2023-25. In our trial, this plan does not change. Rather, it is how these LAs are selected that is different.

#### What's involved

#### **Randomisation**

Our evaluation will take the form of a Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT). This means that whether or not applying LAs are selected to receive funding to deliver Staying Close will be decided at random. RCTs are the best way for evaluators to find out which programme models bring about the most positive impact for recipients.



Evaluations involve making comparisons between two groups: one receiving the intervention, the other not. Ideally, an impact evaluation would compare the outcomes of the same individuals in two parallel worlds: one in which they are exposed to the new intervention, and one in which they are not, to understand what *would have* happened in its absence. This is of course not possible - we must rely on comparing two sets of real people in *this* world. The strength of our comparisons depends on how similar these two groups are.

With randomisation, we are making sure the young people who receive the programme are as similar as possible to the young people who don't, on average. This makes our comparisons far more meaningful than, for example, comparing the outcomes of an individual who volunteered to take part in a programme with the outcomes of an individual who refused, who are likely very different in their attitudes, background and predispositions.

If we are successful in making our groups highly similar in our evaluation, we (and HMT) can be confident that any differences we see are the result of the Staying Close rather than any other differences between the LAs. Including a wider range of LAs, rather than just those who submit the strongest bids, will also tell us more about how Staying Close is likely to work in 'real-world' conditions if rolled out more widely.

#### **Continued engagement**

This means that LAs who are assigned to be our 'controls' are enormously important to the success of the evaluation and the quality of evidence we are able to put forward to advocate for Staying Close. Without their continued engagement in the project, the comparisons we are able to make will cease to be meaningful or convincing to decision makers.

That said, we appreciate that your participation in the project will require time and effort. We want to make sure that all participating LAs, whatever the result of the randomisation, get something of value out of the project. We've included more details of what we are offering 'control' LAs below.

#### **Timescale**

The research will run for the same timescale as the funding: from April 2023 to March 2025.

#### Your role

Naming a project coordinator who can be a point of contact for the researchers through the project.

Complying with random assignment as specified by the evaluator.

Facilitating the collection of data and/or providing existing administrative data

Supporting qualitative components of the evaluation, which may involve interviews, focus groups and surveys of relevant stakeholders.

#### What else we'll do for you

We're also offering the following to LAs assigned to the control group:

- LAs will receive a flat £2,000 payment to contribute to staff time involved in the evaluation.
- WWEICSC will offer half-day Theory of Change workshops for LA Leaving Care teams. Practitioners and managers report finding this really helpful in understanding their intervention / programme better and how it could be refined or improved.
- WWEICSC will offer Readiness to Trial training where LAs can learn more about evaluation and how it can be embedded in their work to improve delivery.
- WWEICSC researchers will work with LAs to conduct benchmarking analyses for their Leaving Care teams (e.g. NEET rates, homelessness, CAHMS).

•	WWEICSC will provide support to LAs to co-design their surveys for young people to include measures which might be of particular interest to them.

#### **FAQ**

# How does using the RCT approach impact on the potential for our LA to receive funding?

Applications which pass the DfE minimum threshold, as set out above, will be included in a randomised selection process to determine which LAs will receive funding. Roughly half of LAs will be assigned to receive Staying Close funding (the 'treatment' group) with other LAs assigned to 'control' and continuing to deliver business-as-usual support for young people. The 'control' group will not receive funding for the programme, however other incentives will be available – detail of this is set out in the guidance.

#### Will we be compensated for our time working on the evaluation?

All LAs assigned to the control group will be compensated for the time they spend on research activities. This compensation will be made up of:

A flat fee which might be put towards, for example, activities for social workers in the Leaving Care Team to do with young people;

A range of other offers from WWEICSC, including evaluation training and benchmarking analyses.

Please see details earlier in this document.

# Does the evaluation mean that fewer young people are receiving support?

No. DfE's budget for delivering the programme across LAs has not changed - it is the means of selection (which is randomised) which is different to usual funding rounds and is allowing us to conduct this important research.

#### Has research ethics been considered?

WWEICSC's internal ethics panel will consider the project. WWEICSC's DPO will work with LAs to draft Data Sharing Agreements to ensure that data sharing is GDPR compliant and considers the rights of young people.

#### When will we be told the outcome of the random selection process?

The randomisation will take place in March 2023, and DfE will issue letters of intent to LAs as soon as possible afterwards. Final confirmation will happen in March 2023 after HMT approval has been granted.



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