

Report to CABINET

Staying Close Leaving Care Offer

Portfolio Holder:

Cllr S Mushtaq

Officer Contact: Julie Daniels, Executive Director, Children's Services

Report Author: Nick Whitbread, Assistant Director, Corporate Parenting

23rd March 2026

Reason for Decision

The decision is required to formally approve the establishment and implementation of Oldham's **Staying Close model**, which provides an enhanced, relationship-based package of practical and emotional support for care leavers aged 16–25 whose welfare requires provision beyond the statutory Local Offer. The Staying Close programme strengthens early planning from age 16, ensures each eligible young person has a **Trusted Person**, improves access to and sustainment of suitable accommodation, and coordinates multi-agency support across health, wellbeing, education, employment, and relationships. Approving the model enables Oldham to address significant local needs—including housing pressures, mental health inequalities, and risks of homelessness and social isolation—while embedding a sustainable, multi-agency approach that improves long-term outcomes for care leavers.

The decision also ensures compliance with the national Staying Close programme, secures alignment with Oldham's existing Leaving Care pathways, and enables the Council to utilise the allocated DfE grant funding (£331,091 per year for three years) to deliver a high-quality, evidence-based offer that represents an "invest to save" opportunity through reduced crisis demand, improved tenancy sustainment, and better EET outcomes.

Recommendations

Approve the acceptance of the grant money with the purpose to establish and implementation of Oldham's **Staying Close model**.

Staying Close Leaving Care Offer

1 Background

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- 1.1 Oldham Council is implementing a new **Staying Close** model to strengthen support for care leavers aged 16–25 whose welfare requires more intensive provision than the statutory Local Offer alone. The decision follows national rollout of the Department for Education’s Staying Close programme and reflects Oldham’s commitment to improving outcomes for young people transitioning from care into adulthood.
 - 1.2 Oldham’s local context includes significant socio-economic pressures, high levels of deprivation, challenges in the local housing market, and increasing mental health inequalities. These factors contribute to heightened risks of homelessness, social isolation, disrupted education, and poor wellbeing for many care leavers. Young people in Oldham have consistently highlighted the need for improved mental health support, stable accommodation, practical life-skills, and stronger relationships with trusted adults—all of which underpin the design of the Staying Close model.
 - 1.3 The borough’s care leaver population presents with a wide range of needs, including trauma histories, experiences of exploitation, SEND-related needs, and a diverse cohort including Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children who require culturally sensitive support. Oldham operates within established multi-agency partnerships including housing, ICB/NHS mental health services, DWP SPOCs, Youth Justice, the Virtual School, and the VCSE sector. Staying Close integrates closely with these structures to ensure consistent, joined-up pathways for young people.
 - 1.4 The model builds on existing Leaving Care services by introducing a dedicated **Staying Close Team**, offering enhanced relational support, smaller caseloads, a Trusted Person for each young person, earlier transition planning from age 16, and improved coordination across housing, health, education, employment and wellbeing. It is designed as a sustainable, long-term component of Oldham’s Local Offer and contributes to an “invest-to-save” approach by preventing homelessness, reducing crisis service use and supporting young people towards independence.

2 **Current Position**

- 2.1 Funding has been provisionally approved by the DfE and we await Grant renumeration letters in March 2026.

3 **Options/Alternatives**

3.1 **Option 1 – Do Nothing / Continue with Existing Leaving Care Provision**

Under this option Oldham would continue delivering its statutory Local Offer for care leavers without implementing the enhanced Staying Close model.

- **Advantages:**
 - No structural change to current service delivery.
 - No need for new workforce investment.
- **Disadvantages:**
 - Oldham would not utilise the DfE Staying Close grant (£331,091 per year), risking reduced long-term outcomes and missed “invest-to-save” opportunities.
 - Fails to enhance clear local needs including risks of homelessness, mental-health inequalities, social isolation, and poor EET outcomes among care leavers.
 - Young people would not benefit from earlier planning from age 16, smaller caseloads, Trusted Person relationships, or enhanced wellbeing and accommodation support—all core elements identified as priorities by young people.
 - Does not meet expectations set out in national Staying Close guidance.

Conclusion:

This option does not meet the needs of Oldham's care leavers and does not align with the national programme.

3.2 **Option 2 – Partial / Limited Implementation of Staying Close**

This option would introduce some elements of the model—for example, a Trusted Person offer or some housing-related support—but without creating the full Staying Close Team, multi-agency pathway, or full accommodation, wellbeing and EET support package.

- **Advantages:**

- Lower cost and reduced staffing requirement.
- Minimal changes to existing structures.

- **Disadvantages:**

- Risks non-compliance with DfE grant expectations and may undermine sustainability planning.
- Would not deliver the full benefits evidenced in the Delivery Plan, especially the relational model, reduced caseloads, mental-health navigation, and integrated housing and EET support.
- Fails to address complexity of need (trauma, exploitation risks, SEND, UASC, homelessness pressures).
- Would weaken governance, data, and performance monitoring mechanisms essential for DfE reporting.
- Young people could receive an inconsistent and diluted offer; does not reflect their feedback on the need for better emotional support, practical help, and consistent relationships.

Conclusion:

This option offers limited benefits and does not meet the programme requirements.

3.3 **Option 3 – Full Implementation of the Staying Close Model (Recommended)**

Oldham implements the full Staying Close model as set out in the Delivery Plan, including: a dedicated Staying Close Team; dual adviser/Trusted Person roles; early planning from age 16; multi-agency referral panel; mental wellbeing navigation; tenancy sustainment support; group skills development; digital engagement; comprehensive data and evaluation; and strong governance via the Corporate Parenting Board.

- **Advantages:**

- Fully utilises DfE grant funding and aligns with national Staying Close expectations.
- Provides enhanced, relationship-based support tailored to the needs of Oldham's care leavers, including those at highest risk of homelessness, exploitation, mental-health difficulties, and social isolation.
- Embeds a sustainable multi-agency approach with housing, health, employment, adult services, and education partners.
- Reduces crisis demand and supports long-term cost avoidance in homelessness, health crises, and justice involvement.
- Strong governance, data, and performance oversight ensure continuous improvement and service quality.

Conclusion:

This option best meets Oldham's needs and maximises impact.

4 Preferred Option

4.1 Option 3 – Full Implementation of the Staying Close Model

This is the preferred option because it delivers the comprehensive Staying Close model described in the Delivery Plan, offering a high-quality, relationship-based and multi-agency approach that directly addresses Oldham’s contextual pressures—housing instability, mental-health inequality, trauma, and the risk of young people falling through gaps in transition.

[https://oldham365-my.sharepoint.com/personal/nick_whitbread_oldham_gov_uk/_layouts/15/Doc.aspx?sourcedoc={D093BBA8-1025-4705-AF2E-202AB8435EC3}&file=Oldham Staying Close Delivery Plan January 2026.docx&action=default&mobileredirect=true](https://oldham365-my.sharepoint.com/personal/nick_whitbread_oldham_gov_uk/_layouts/15/Doc.aspx?sourcedoc={D093BBA8-1025-4705-AF2E-202AB8435EC3}&file=Oldham%20Staying%20Close%20Delivery%20Plan%20January%202026.docx&action=default&mobileredirect=true)

It introduces a dedicated Staying Close Team with reduced caseloads; Trusted Person roles; early pathway planning from age 16; a multi-agency referral panel; wellbeing and life-skills support; mental-health navigation; and strong governance reporting to the Corporate Parenting Board. This model responds to the expressed priorities of young people, ensures compliance with DfE expectations, and aligns with Oldham’s strategic commitment to improving outcomes for care leavers.

The preferred option also supports an “invest-to-save” approach by reducing homelessness, crisis presentations, and instability, while improving EET engagement and long-term independence, contributing to financial sustainability beyond the three-year grant period. [\[Oldham Sta...nuary 2026 | Word\]](#)

4.2 Staffing Structure

As per the Delivery Plan, the Staying Close team consists of 6 posts (5 FTE roles + 1 apprentice):

1. Staying Close Team Manager (1.0 FTE)
2. Staying Close Personal Advisers – 2 posts (2.0 FTE)
3. Transitional Safeguarding Social Worker (1.0 FTE)
4. Mental Wellbeing Care Navigator (1.0 FTE)
5. Wellbeing & Participation Apprentice (1.0 FTE)

These roles form the operational leadership, relational support, safeguarding continuity, mental-health navigation, and wellbeing/participation functions central to the Staying Close model.

4.3 Oldham’s Staying Close model will be delivered by a dedicated multi-disciplinary team consisting of a Team Manager, two Staying Close Personal Advisers, a Transitional Safeguarding Social Worker, a Mental Wellbeing Care Navigator, and a Wellbeing & Participation Apprentice. This structure enables reduced caseloads, continuity across transitions, strengthened safeguarding, improved mental-health navigation, and a wellbeing-focused offer aligned to young people’s priorities. Total costs are funded through the Staying Close DfE grant allocation.

5 Consultation

5.1 Feedback on Delivery Plan from the DfE received 3rd February 2026:

Overall, we are very happy with your plan.

The strengths included:

- your consideration of eligibility and the cohort targeted
- stakeholder engagement, with a multiagency panel planned to support internal referrals, collaboration with housing providers
- Clear KPIs and data reporting to corporate parenting board
- An ambitious but deliverable timeline for service delivery from July 2026.
- Costs and roles are suitable and meet the requirements of the programme guide.

5.2 Oldham has been ‘buddied’ with Stockport who have had a Staying Close offer in place since 2022.

6 Financial Implications

6.1 The report is requesting formal approval of the Staying Close model. The model consists of the following additional staff:

	Grade	FTE		
Team Manager	10	1	£	74,460
Personal advisors/Trusted person	6	2	£	104,020
Transitional Safeguarding Social Worker	7	1	£	58,380
Mental Health Care Navigator	6	1	£	52,010
Wellbeing & Participation Apprentice	Level 3	1	£	30,520
		6	£	319,390

The posts are costed at the top of grade and are inclusive of on costs.

Funding

The Council has submitted a delivery plan to the DfE for the Staying Close funding which is £331,091 from 2026-27 for 3 years. As outlined in the report, the submission has had positive feedback from the DfE with funding confirmation expected March 2026.

The new posts are within the funding envelope and therefore there are no adverse financial implications. It should be noted, recruitment to the posts should not commence until final funding confirmation is received.

(Nicola Harrop – Finance Manager)

7 Legal Implications

7.1 The Council must be satisfied it can meet the objectives and terms and conditions and milestones imposed by the funding authority including any obligation to provide match funding, to monitor, keep records and file returns. Officers must also check the terms do not conflict with other funding conditions for the scheme already in place and ensure compliance with all relevant regulations including Transparency obligations.

7.2 All works, services and goods procured by or on behalf of the Council must be procured in compliance with the Council’s Contract Procedure Rules and all other relevant regulations including, where applicable, the Financial Procedure Rules and Land and Property Protocol. Officers must work with legal colleagues to approve and formalise the terms of any grant agreement or MOU in conjunction with finance and audit colleagues.

- 7.3 The Service must ensure that Subsidy Control is considered (if relevant) in consultation with Legal Services and that all relevant assessments are made and recorded and all relevant regulations and legislation are complied with. External advice may be needed to support these activities.
- 7.4 If any grant funds are to be spent on supplies, works or services, the Council must undertake any commissioning activity in accordance with Contract Procedure Rules, incorporating relevant national procurement legislation.
- 7.5 The Report Author has confirmed that the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Procedure Rules continue to be complied with (Rebecca Boyle – Corporate Group Solicitor).

8 HR Implications

- 8.1 I would advise the service to look at what positions and empty positions you have within current structure where you may be able to have them reevaluated by the JE team to ensure the tasks and duties within the positions is aligned to expectations of Staying Close.
- 8.2 Seek expressions of interest from current staff to retain knowledge and experience.
- 8.3 Service to be aware that staff gain employment rights after two years and should funding stop after three years, the Council need to be aware of redundancy costs. Be aware that redundancy should be the last resort and redeployment opportunities should be sought in the first instance.
- 8.4 Adherence to Oldham's policies is required.

9 Equality Impact, including implications for Children and Young People



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- 9.1 Yes – EIA completed -

10 Key Decision

- 10.1 Yes

11 Key Decision Reference

- 11.1 CYP-01-26
- 12.2 Report Timescales:

Meeting	Deadline
Children's DMT	Mon 9 Feb
Cabinet Member Approval	Thur 19 Feb
Management Board on 4 March	Friday, 27 Feb

Leadership on 9 March	Lunchtime on Weds, 4 March (any amends from management board to be made by lunchtime)
Cabinet on 23 March	Close of Weds, 11 March

13 **Background Papers**

13.1 Please see Staying Close Delivery Plan at Appendix I



Department
for Education

Staying Close

Delivery plan form

January 2026

Project start: April 2026

Section 1 – How your plan will be reviewed

There are four questions that we would like further information about. The questions focus on:

- 1) Your proposed Staying Close model
- 2) Engagement with stakeholders and partners
- 3) Governance
- 4) A clear and realistic delivery plan

Delivery plans will be reviewed to ensure that plans are realistic and feasible for delivery. We will either agree your plan or give suggestions for improvements. As long as your plans are within the scope of Staying Close, this will not impact the funding allocation we offer you – the feedback process is designed to support you to implement the programme.

Section 2 – Contact details

Part A – Contact details

Name of Local Authority (LA)	OLDHAM COUNCIL
Name of Officer	NICK WHITBREAD
Role of Officer	ASSISTANT DIRECTOR – CORPORATE PARENTING
Officer contact email	nick.whitbread@oldham.gov.uk
Region (East Midlands, East of England, London, North East, North West, South East, South West, West Midlands, Yorkshire and Humber).	NORTH WEST

Section 3 – Your Staying Close model

Q1) Please set out your proposed Staying Close model. This should include:

- Details of your Staying Close offer; how it will build on any existing provision; how it will meet the minimum offer set out in the new Staying Close guidance and how you plan to enhance your offer through innovative or bespoke elements.
- How your offer will meet the needs of your young people (please include any specific needs or characteristics of your young people or contextual detail of the local area which have relevance to the model, and which cohorts you intend to target).
- How you will ensure that your model is sustainable year on year and is embedded in your local offer to care leavers.

Total word count: (Max 1000 words)

Oldham's Staying Close model provides an enhanced, relationship-based package of practical and emotional support for care leavers aged 16–25 whose welfare requires provision beyond the statutory Local Offer. It builds on existing Leaving Care services by establishing a dedicated Staying Close Team embedded within the Leaving Care service and working in close partnership with housing, health, education and employment services. The model meets the minimum expectations of the Staying Close programme by: identifying need early (from age 16) through pathway planning; identifying a Trusted Person to each eligible young person; supporting access to and sustainment of suitable accommodation; and coordinating support across health and wellbeing, relationships, education, employment and participation in society.

We will enhance our offer through four bespoke features: (i) Dual Adviser Model: where needs exceed Oldham's Local Offer, a Staying Close Personal Adviser (SC-PA) will combine statutory PA duties with the Trusted Person role, reducing fragmentation, enabling earlier relationship-building (from 16–17), and maintaining smaller caseloads (up to 10) to deliver intensive support. (ii) A Multi-Agency Pathway: we will operate a single referral 'front door' to Staying Close, with triage at a fortnightly panel involving Leaving Care, Housing Options, Adult Social Care, ICB/NHS mental health partners and EET leads, mirroring good practice in transition boards. (iii) A Wellbeing & Skills Offer: the team will coordinate life-skills (cooking, budgeting, tenancy sustainment), group activities to address loneliness, and rapid access to in-house mental-health triage (brief interventions and supported referrals to AMHS). (iv) Digital Engagement: to sustain relationships for care leavers living out of area or working irregular hours, we will use scheduled video check-ins and secure messaging alongside face-to-face work, ensuring continuity without replacing relational practice.

Oldham's care leavers include young people who have experienced trauma, disrupted education and mental health challenges, with some at heightened risk of homelessness and NEET. Housing supply pressures and transitions to adult services can create a 'cliff-edge' without coordinated support. Our model targets three cohorts: (a) Eligible/Relevant 16–18-year-olds for early planning and relationship-building; (b) Former Relevant 18–25-year-olds

whose welfare requires Staying Close (including those returning after opting out of PA support); and (c) specialist groups—young parents, those leaving custody, and former Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), who may require culturally and linguistically sensitive support and help to build community networks.

For accommodation, the team will plan transitions early, assess suitability, and coordinate options across all accommodation options. Where necessary, we will explore rent-guarantor arrangements and use a joint housing protocol for prevention and contingency planning, consistent with expectations to avoid unsustainable temporary options and reduce homelessness risk. Independent living skills will be taught practically (e.g. cook-and-eat sessions), with materials that are accessible and tailored; financial capability will be strengthened through budgeting coaching, support to manage bills/arrears, and facilitation of access to welfare entitlements via Jobcentre Plus Care Leaver SPOCs.

For health and wellbeing, Trusted Persons, SC-Pas and a specialist Mental Wellbeing Care Navigator will provide proactive wellbeing check-ins, brief interventions (where we have an in-house practitioner), and facilitated referrals to adult mental-health services, advocating with CAMHS/AMHS thresholds where appropriate and working with ICB partners. We will also address loneliness through group activities, peer networks and volunteering opportunities. These actions are in direct response from the surveys and voices of our young people, who have highlighted mental wellbeing and preventative mental wellbeing support as their main priorities for service improvement moving forward.

For EET, we will link with local colleges, apprenticeship providers and employers; offer application and interview support; and ensure access to bursaries, with additional support for care leavers in higher education (holiday accommodation planning and university services). Finally, participation and relationships work will focus on network-building, family finding/reunification where safe, mentoring links, and support for democratic participation (e.g. voter registration and ID).

Our sustainability approach addresses governance, workforce, finance, data and continuous improvement. Governance: The Staying Close Team will report bi annually to the Corporate Parenting Board, with senior oversight from Children's Services leadership. We will operate clear operational management lines within Leaving Care, ensuring alignment between pathway planning and Staying Close delivery and enabling cross-council corporate-parenting accountability.

Workforce and practice model: We will maintain reduced caseloads for SC-PAs (up to 10) and for the dedicated transitional safeguarding practitioner (generally <15, flexed for complexity) – this role will bridge safeguarding responsibilities between children's and adult services, ensuring continuity of protection and risk management during transition, including young people at risk of sexual and criminal exploitation. We will invest in a core training offer (trauma-informed practice, motivational interviewing, tenancy sustainment, welfare rights, and cultural competence for UASC). This ensures quality and continuity across transitions.

Data, outcomes and learning: We will implement a data model aligned to DfE quarterly returns, capturing assessments, uptake, activity and outcomes (accommodation sustainment, EET engagement, wellbeing, reduced crisis presentations). Routine case audits and young people's

feedback will drive iterative improvements and commissioning decisions.

Financial sustainability and 'invest-to-save': Over the three-year grant window, we will model cost avoidance in homelessness (reduced temporary accommodation spend), crisis health usage, and youth justice involvement through tenancy sustainment and earlier intervention. We will seek economies of scale via joint commissioning (e.g., supported accommodation provisions), explore social value leverages with local partners, and align Staying Close with existing funded programmes to avoid duplication. Financial monitoring, overseen by Children's Services finance and audited annually, will evidence effective grant usage and inform future baselining within Oldham's core budgets.

Embedding in the Local Offer: We will publish the Staying Close criteria, referral route, Trusted Person arrangements and entitlements within Oldham's Care Leaver Local Offer, ensuring transparency for young people and partners and securing long-term continuity as Staying Close responsibilities evolve nationally.

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Q2) Please set out how you will engage partners and stakeholders in the development and delivery of your Staying Close offer. This should include:

- How you will work with other teams within your LA, private children's homes providers, charities, the voluntary sector and other relevant organisations.
- How you will embed effective partnership working in your Staying Close model.
- How you will work with LA services out of area to support care leavers who no longer live in the local authority.

Total word count: (Max 500 words)

Oldham will embed strong, accountable and collaborative partnership working at every stage of the Staying Close pathway, recognising that high-quality outcomes for care leavers rely on seamless multi-agency coordination. Our partnership approach is both operational and strategic, ensuring that all agencies with a role in supporting care leavers contribute consistently and are aligned around shared priorities for safety, stability and long-term independence.

Internal partnership working

Within Oldham Council, the Staying Close Team will work alongside Children in Care Social

Work teams, Leaving Care, Housing Options, Youth Justice, the Virtual School, Commissioning, Adult Social Care, SEND, and Early Help to ensure young people experience a smooth transition through services and do not fall through gaps. A dedicated referral and fortnightly multi-agency panel will provide joint decision-making, ensuring that accommodation, EET, health, risk and safeguarding needs are considered in a coordinated way. Clear escalation pathways will enable urgent issues—such as emerging homelessness risks, mental health deterioration, or exploitation concerns—to be rapidly addressed by the relevant partners. The Staying Close Team Manager will sit within the Leaving Care service so that Staying Close is fully integrated into existing pathway planning processes. Joint supervision, aligned assessments, shared digital case notes and collaborative planning meetings will ensure consistency of practice and reduce duplication for young people.

External partnership working with providers and the voluntary sector

Oldham's Staying Close model relies on strong engagement with private providers, registered housing providers, and the voluntary and community sector. We will ensure partners are brought together to review how the Staying Close offer is working in practice, share best practice, identify barriers and drive joint problem-solving. Accommodation providers will be closely involved in transition planning from age 16, strengthening preparation for adulthood and enabling young people to build confidence before leaving care.

Partners such as DWP Care Leaver SPOCs, Voluntary Section and local FE providers will offer coordinated welfare and EET support, ensuring young people can access bursaries, training and employment opportunities through a streamlined route.

Partnership working with health services

Given Oldham's clear need for improved mental health access, partnership with ICB/NHS services is central. The Mental Wellbeing Care Navigator will act as a bridge between Staying Close and local mental health services, facilitating referrals, advocating where thresholds are challenging, and ensuring continuity when young people transition from CAMHS to AMHS. Shared training, escalation protocols and multi-agency case discussions will support consistent decision-making.

Out-of-area support

For care leavers placed outside Oldham, the Staying Close team will maintain oversight through digital engagement, planned visits, information-sharing agreements and partnership arrangements with host authorities. This ensures young people continue to receive consistent support regardless of geographical location.

Co-production with young people

Young people's voices remain central. The Children in Care Council and Care Leaver Forum will continue to influence service design, review operational processes, contribute to performance monitoring and sit on recruitment panels for Staying Close staff. Continuous feedback loops—including surveys, group discussions and reflective sessions—will inform ongoing improvements.

Through these coordinated partnership structures Oldham will deliver a cohesive, high-quality Staying Close offer that wraps around young people and supports safe, meaningful transitions into adulthood.

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Q3) Please set out the governance model for your Staying Close offer. This should include:

- How you will secure senior support for Staying Close within your LA and ensure strategic oversight, scrutiny, and support.
- Management and responsibility for operational delivery.
- The role of your Corporate Parenting board in the ongoing development and delivery of your Staying Close offer.

Total word count: (Max 500 words)

Governance will operate at strategic and operational levels. Strategic oversight sits with the Corporate Parenting Panel, chaired by young people and senior elected members and the Director of Children's Services as programme sponsor. Corporate Parenting Panel will receive bi-annual performance dashboards, financial reports and thematic deep-dives (e.g. accommodation sustainment, mental health access). This will provide opportunity to review impact, offer scrutiny and assurance in progress of the delivery plan.

Operational accountability lies with the Staying Close Team Manager within the Leaving Care Service, supported by the established Head of Service, SC-PAs, Transitional Safeguarding Social Worker and Wellbeing and Participation Apprentice. Monthly management meetings will review caseloads, workforce capacity, risk registers and partnership development.

Safeguarding integration is critical: the Transitional Safeguarding Social Worker will link children's and adult safeguarding board priorities, ensuring continuity for young people with complex needs. Escalation routes for high-risk cases will be embedded in governance protocols, with immediate reporting to senior managers and safeguarding partnerships.

Performance monitoring will include KPIs on accommodation sustainment, EET engagement, wellbeing outcomes and crisis reduction. Data will feed into DfE quarterly returns and local dashboards. Quality Assurance exercises and young people's feedback reports will inform continuous improvement.

Established Children's Services decision-making systems will approve process and policy changes and resource allocations, ensuring alignment with statutory duties and strategic priorities. Governance will also oversee compliance with grant conditions, value-for-money assurance, and sustainability planning beyond the funding window.

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Q4) Please set out a clear and realistic delivery plan to demonstrate how you will

establish and deliver Staying Close in your locality (you may attach relevant plans if available). This should include:

- High level milestones for 2026-27.
- A detailed resource plan (capacity, expertise, roles and responsibilities).
- Risks, mitigations and contingencies.

Total word count: (Max 1000 words)

Purpose and scope

This delivery plan sets out how Oldham will establish and deliver Staying Close with clear milestones, capacity and roles, workforce development, dependencies, risks and contingencies, monitoring and evaluation, and sustainability actions.

A. High-level milestones (2026–27)

Q1 (Apr–Jun 2026): Mobilisation and set-up

- **Recruitment & onboarding:** Appoint Staying Close Team Manager, SC-Personal Advisers, Transitional Safeguarding Social Worker, Mental Wellbeing Care Navigator and Wellbeing and Participation Apprentice. Complete HR checks, induction, and IT setup.
- **Referral / Access:** Stand up single referral / access route; agree fortnightly multi-agency transition panel terms of reference and escalation pathways.
- **Pathways & documents:** Establish eligibility criteria, update assessment tools, include the Trusted Person / Staying Close offer in Oldham’s Care Leaver Local Offer; update joint housing protocol and information-sharing agreements.
- **Training & practice standards:** Deliver core training (trauma-informed practice, tenancy sustainment, welfare rights, safeguarding transitions, cultural competence for UASC). Establish practice standards and working model.
- **Comms & engagement:** Brief internal services and external partners (Virtual School, SEND, Voluntary Sector, accommodation providers, FE/Skills, DWP, ICB/NHS); launch comms to young people, carers and homes.

Q2 (Jul–Sep 2026): Initial delivery and data foundations

- **Caseload build:** Begin support for first cohorts – Eligible / Relevant 16/18 – establish Trusted Person, support with Pathway Planning and contingency planning; Former Relevant 18 – 25 – prioritise those with complex needs, challenging circumstances, risk of homelessness, crisis reduction, NEET
- **Wellbeing & Skills Hub:** Launch group life-skills sessions (budgeting, cook-and-eat, tenancy sustainment), peer activities to address loneliness and brief wellbeing interventions.
- **Digital engagement:** Implement secure messaging/video check-ins for all young people but including those out-of-area and irregular-hours work; integrate with case management for audit trail.
- **Data dashboard:** Turn on KPI dashboard (accommodation sustainment, EET engagement, wellbeing indicators, crisis reduction, impact of work undertaken); produce Q2 outcomes report for Corporate Parenting Panel.

Q3 (Oct–Dec 2026): Consolidation and improvement

- **Scaling:** Expand access, embed joint work with ICB/NHS for mental health services and escalation where thresholds are challenging.
- **Audit & quality:** Complete quality assurance exercises; test the Staying Close / Trusted Person model fidelity (contact frequency, relationship-building, practical support) and impact of pathway planning.
- **Workforce CPD:** Run targeted masterclasses (motivational interviewing, tenancy risk planning, complex case conferencing).
- **Invest-to-save analysis:** Start measuring cost avoidance trends (e.g. temporary accommodation reductions, supported accommodation reductions, crisis health usage, reduced justice involvement).
- **Partnership forum:** Hold quarterly forum to address blockages and share best practice.

Q4 (Jan–Mar 2027): Evaluation and forward plan

- **Annual evaluation:** Combine KPI results, audit findings, cost-benefit insights, and young people's feedback into a full-year review; recommend improvements and commissioning changes.
- **Sustainability & scaling plan:** Confirm 2027–28 capacity and commissioning requirements; refine Local Offer content; align with budget setting.
- **Reporting:** Produce annual summary for Corporate Parenting Panel and DfE returns; share a young people-friendly report.

B. Detailed resource plan (capacity, expertise, roles, responsibilities)

Core team (indicative FTE mix):

- Staying Close Team Manager (1.0): Operational lead, performance/governance reporting, practice standards, partnership coordination. Establish, develop and maintain a multi-agency Care Leaver Hub.
- SC-Personal Advisers/Trusted Persons (2.0): Identify Trusted Person and Pathway Planning support for young Eligible Care Leavers and provide additional support to Former Relevant Care Leavers, combining statutory PA and Trusted Person function,

reduced caseloads (up to 10), intensive relationship-based support, practical life-skills coaching, multi-agency coordination and pathway planning.

- Transitional Safeguarding Social Worker (1.0): Bridge between children's and adult safeguarding services; risk management, complex case conferencing, exploitation/risk assessments, safeguarding escalation.
- Mental Wellbeing Care Navigator (1.0): provide signposting to digital, app-based, helpline and face-to-face support to care leavers. Provide advice to recommend self-help, precautionary safety / crisis advice and provide a listening ear through the Trusted Person
- Wellbeing and Participation Apprentice (1.0): Promote participation and engagement activities, support wellbeing assessments, support referrals to AMHS/VCSE services; staff consultation and reflective practice.

C. Workforce development (quality, supervision, wellbeing)

- Induction & core training: Trauma-informed practice; motivational interviewing; tenancy sustainment and budgeting; welfare rights/DWP SPOCs; safeguarding transitions; cultural competence (UASC); mental wellbeing
- Supervision & fidelity: Monthly supervision (case-based and reflective), quarterly practice observation, and fidelity checks on Trusted Person delivery (in touch, goals tracked, outcomes).
- CPD & joint learning: Quarterly masterclasses with partners (ICB/NHS, housing, FE/Get Oldham Working, DWP); reflective sessions for complex transitions.

D. Digital engagement and information governance

- Tools: Secure messaging and scheduled video check-ins; simple micro-learning tools (budget prompts, tenancy tips).
- IG & consent: Privacy notices explained to young people; consent-based data sharing; GDPR-compliant partner agreements; safeguarding-led information sharing when risk indicates necessity.
- Access & equity: Offer digital alternatives for those with shift work, anxiety, or distance; retain face-to-face for relationship building and complex support.

E. Risks, mitigations, and contingencies

Key risks & mitigations:

1. Workforce capacity/retention: Reduced caseloads; targeted recruitment; agency/secondments backfill; wellbeing supports; succession planning.
2. Housing supply constraints: Joint housing protocol; early planning; private-sector engagement; explore rent-guarantor; prioritisation for highest risk; floating support to stabilise.
3. AMHS access/thresholds: In-house brief interventions; agreed escalation routes with ICB; case conferencing; advocacy; use of VCSE pathways while AMHS is pending.
4. Engagement and loneliness: Peer groups, mentoring, flexible digital/face-to-face options; Trusted Person outreach and practical hooks (cook-and-eat, moving-day support).
5. Data quality and timeliness: Standard templates, monthly QA, analyst oversight, feedback loops to practitioners, and data-literacy refreshers.

6. Financial pressures: Invest-to-save tracking; aligning spend to outcomes; mid-year adjustments with Corporate Parenting Panel oversight.
7. Safeguarding complexity: Transitional Safeguarding Officer coordination; formal escalation protocol; multi-agency meetings; contingency placements.

Contingencies:

- Process for emergency accommodation pathway for placement breakdowns; rapid access list and floating support.
- Staffing plan for demand spikes (bank/agency, temporary secondments).
- Service continuity via digital contact/remote delivery during disruptions.
- Critical incident protocol (safeguarding) with immediate senior notification and partner convening.

F. Monitoring, evaluation, and reporting

- KPI set (quarterly): Accommodation sustainment rate (3/6/12 months), EET engagement and progression, wellbeing indicators (e.g. loneliness/self-rated wellbeing), crisis events (A&E, homelessness presentations), timeliness of assessments and Trusted Person allocation and in touch.
- Audit & young people's voice: Monthly case audits; quarterly surveys/focus groups led by the Children in Care Council and Care Leaver Forum; co-production actions logged and tracked.
- Governance reporting: Quarterly performance and finance reports to Corporate Parenting Panel; DfE returns; annual narrative and cost-benefit summary.

G. Sustainability and onward plan

- Embed in BAU: Integrate SC within Leaving Care workflows; pathways in the Local Offer; maintain joint housing and ICB agreements.
- Financial sustainability: Evidence cost avoidance (supported accommodation, crisis health, justice). Use findings to inform budget baselining and joint commissioning.
- Readiness for future duty: Keep alignment with national Staying Close progression, ensuring Oldham is positioned to meet evolving statutory requirements smoothly.

H. Dependencies and enabling conditions

- Corporate support: Ongoing cross-council backing (Children's Services, Housing, Adult Social Care, Finance, Legal, Comms).
- Partner commitment: Active engagement from ICB/NHS, DWP SPOCs, FE/skills providers, VCSE and housing partners.
- Data & systems: Reliable case management, dashboards, and IG processes; capacity for timely returns and analysis.
- Young people's participation: Consistent co-production via forums and feedback, influencing priorities and improvements.

Submitted word count: 1104

Section 4 - Costings

Please set out how you will use the funding to establish and deliver the offer. Costs should include the number of young people you anticipate will access support each year,. You will have received details of your costing allocation separately.

Sustainability models should be developed and you should evidence how you will realise Staying Close as an 'invest to save' opportunity. You should also consider where you can achieve economies of scale over the three years.

The Department reserves the right to clarify and challenge costs where it deems necessary.

Summary of costs

Financial year	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
DfE Funding Allocation (see email)	£331,091	£331,091	£331,091
Number of young people	180	180	180
Indicative cost per young person	£1839	£1839	£1839

Breakdown of costs

Please set out a detailed breakdown of your proposed costs. These costings should provide reasonable assurance that your delivery proposal and delivery of your proposed Staying Close model can be provided within the funding allocation.

Area of spend	Detail	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Workforce – Team Manager	Salary costs and oncosts	£71,560	£71,560	£71,560
Workforce – Staying Close Personal Adviser x 2	Salary costs and oncosts	£98,820	£98,820	£98,820
Workforce – Transitional Safeguarding Social Worker	Salary costs and oncosts	£55,520	£55,520	£55,520

Workforce – Mental Wellbeing Care Navigator	Salary costs and oncosts	£49,410	£49,410	£49,410
Wellbeing & Participation Apprentice	Salary costs and oncosts	£30,520	£30,520	£30,520
Establish Care Leaver Hub	Resources, materials, equipment costs	£10,000	£10,000	£10,000

Financial monitoring and assurance

Please set out below how you will monitor the use of funding to ensure it is used effectively and demonstrates good value for money.

Total word count: (Max 500 words)

Oldham Council will implement a robust, multi-layered financial monitoring and assurance framework to ensure that Staying Close funding is used effectively, transparently and delivers demonstrable value for money. Our approach draws on established Children’s Services financial governance, strengthened by specific controls tailored to the Staying Close grant, outcome-based commissioning principles and rigorous oversight through corporate parenting governance.

1. Financial governance and oversight

Children’s Services Finance will maintain a dedicated Staying Close cost centre with clearly coded expenditure lines for workforce, accommodation-related costs, operational delivery, resources, commissioning and evaluation. This will enable precise tracking of spend against the approved budget profile and ensure strong alignment with grant conditions.

A detailed **monthly budget monitoring report** will be reviewed jointly by the Staying Close Team Manager, Head of Service and Finance Business Partner. This will include variance analysis, forecasted outturn, narrative explanations for movements and early-warning indicators for potential overspend or underspend. Corrective actions will be agreed at each meeting and fed into the departmental finance cycle.

2. Internal controls and compliance

Standard financial controls will apply, including mandatory purchase order (PO) processes, delegated decision-making thresholds, and audit trails for all expenditure. The Staying Close Team Manager will have responsibility for sign-off of day-to-day spending within their delegated limits, with any exceptional or one-off costs requiring authorisation by the Head of Service/

3. Assurance on workforce costs

Given that workforce represents the largest proportion of Staying Close expenditure, staffing structures and caseload capacity will be reviewed quarterly. Costed scenarios will ensure that any fluctuations in demand, recruitment delays or national pay-award pressures are monitored early. Workforce spending will be benchmarked against other Leaving Care service components to ensure proportionality and value for money.

4. Outcome-linked commissioning and value for money

Where external spending is required (e.g., wellbeing resources, group activities, specialist support), Oldham will use outcome-linked commissioning principles. Specifications will include measurable outputs such as improvements in independent living skills, wellbeing indicators or tenancy sustainment, ensuring expenditure is directly tied to impact.

Value-for-money analysis will incorporate:

-
- **Cost avoidance tracking**, including reductions in temporary accommodation use, crisis presentations, repeat homelessness and unplanned care episodes.
 - **Unit cost monitoring** for key outcomes such as sustained EET engagement, tenancy duration, reduced NEET rates and improved mental wellbeing.
 - **Sensitivity modelling** to test financial resilience against changes in referral volume or complexity.

5. Mid-year adjustments and continuous improvement

If monitoring identifies variances or emerging pressures, mid-year budget re-profiling will be undertaken with Finance and reported to Corporate Parenting Board. Adjustments may include reallocating underspend to high-impact interventions, strengthening workforce capacity or investing in preventative supports that reduce downstream cost pressures.

Finally, financial learning—including insights from audits, quarterly reviews, cost avoidance analysis and young people’s feedback—will inform annual service redesign and long-term sustainability planning, ensuring Staying Close remains an efficient, high-impact and financially accountable component of Oldham’s Local Offer.

Submitted word count: 471

Section 5 – Contextual information and number of young people to support

Part A -

Please provide any contextual information that specifically links to your Staying Close offer. This could include information about your LA and locality, your broader care leaver offers, number of children's homes, number of and the specific needs of your young people and your approach to multi-agency working.

Total word count: (Max 500 words)

Oldham's Staying Close offer is being developed within a distinctive local landscape shaped by complex socio-economic pressures, a growing cohort of young people with high support needs, and long-established multi-agency partnerships committed to improving outcomes for care leavers. Oldham is characterised by areas of significant deprivation, a younger-than-average population, and persistent challenges relating to housing availability, health inequalities and mental wellbeing. These contextual factors directly influence the way care leavers transition to adulthood and therefore underpin the design and priorities of our Staying Close model.

The borough currently has a mixed accommodation and care estate, including local authority, voluntary sector and private children's homes, as well as a diverse range of supported accommodation providers operating under the joint housing protocol. Young people leaving care in Oldham often face acute barriers in securing and sustaining accommodation, with pressures on social housing, variable quality in the private rented sector and rising costs of living. Our Staying Close model therefore places a significant emphasis on tenancy sustainment, contingency planning, crisis prevention and early identification of risks that could lead to homelessness, aligning with young people's feedback that "housing stability" and "being able to cope alone" are their top priorities.

Oldham's care leaver population also presents with a wide range of specific needs, including emotional and mental health difficulties, disrupted education, experiences of trauma, exploitation risks, and social isolation. A proportion of our cohort includes young people with SEND needs, those who have experienced exploitation (CCE/CSE), young parents, care leavers who have been in secure or custodial settings, and former Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). UASC in particular benefit from culturally sensitive support, language access, community-building opportunities and help navigating complex immigration or legal processes. These nuanced needs inform our enhanced Staying Close offer, including the Trusted Person, the Mental Wellbeing Care Navigator, and our targeted wellbeing and life-skills support.

Oldham has a long history of multi-agency working, and Staying Close will integrate fully within these established partnerships. Our joint housing protocol, the Corporate Parenting

Partnership, the ICB/NHS mental health collaboration, the Virtual School, Youth Justice Service, DWP Care Leaver SPOCs and local VCSE partners all contribute to shared pathways and a consistent local offer. Feedback mechanisms through the Children in Care Council, the Care Leaver Forum and wider participation structures ensure continuous co-production. Young people have repeatedly emphasised the importance of accessible mental health support, practical help in moments of crisis, opportunities to build peer networks, and a smoother transition into adult services. These insights have strongly shaped the operational model and core priorities of Staying Close.

Given the size of Oldham’s care leaver population and the phased nature of support, we anticipate supporting **approximately 70 young people each year**, recognising that duration, intensity and timing of engagement will vary. This includes Eligible/Relevant young people from age 16 who benefit from early planning, and Former Relevant young people up to age 25 whose welfare requires continued or re-engaged support.

Overall, Oldham’s contextual environment—marked by high need, strong partnership foundations and clear feedback from young people—creates both the imperative and opportunity for a robust, relationship-led Staying Close model that strengthens safety, stability and long-term life chances.

Submitted word count: 523


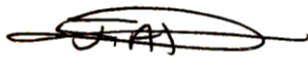
Part B - Number of young people your Staying Close offer will support

Please set out the number of young people you aim to support in each delivery year. (We accept this is an indicative number and recognise that young people will need to access the support at different times and may require the support for different length of times).

	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Number of young people	30	40	50

Section 6 – Declaration

Please complete the below declaration, to be signed by both the LA's bidding officer and the Director of Children's Services (DCS).

DECLARATION* (Please complete in block capitals) Signatures must be either be submitted electronically or scanned in.	
I confirm that the information given in this application is true and complete; that, if successful, the local authority will administer any grant in accordance with the letter supplied by the Department for Education.	
Full name:	NICK WHITBREAD
Position (Job Title):	ASSISTANT DIRECTOR – CORPORATE PARENTING
Date:	19 TH JANUARY 2026
Contact details including email address:	CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE LEVEL 8 SPINDLES SHOPPING CENTRE OLDHAM OL1 <u>NICK.WHITBREAD@OLDHAM.GOV.UK</u>
Signature:	
Countersigned (by the DCS):	
	JULIE DANIELS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR – OLDHAM CHILDREN'S SERVICES

