

Staying Put Arrangements

Foster Carer's Leaflet



"I am now part of the staying put agenda and that has enabled me to stay put with my foster carers that I was living with before I was eighteen. This has helped me to stay on at college and to continue to reach my goals. My carers are really supportive of what I want to do. Being able to stay put has meant pretty much everything to me. If I had gone independent at eighteen I wouldn't have lasted and would have had to go back to my parents which wouldn't have worked out. I wouldn't have progressed as a person and I would have had different prospects."

Young Person

Leaving Care

In accordance with Rochdale MBC's Pledge to its Cared For children and young people, Children's Services is committed to promoting the successful transition to adulthood for cared for children and young people by ensuring they have the opportunities to learn the skills they need towards becoming independent adults.

Children's Services is of the view that eligible cared for young people should expect the same level of care and support with regard to the transition to adulthood that others would expect from a reasonable parent.

The transition to adulthood can be a turbulent time and young people can become an adult in one area but not in another. Young people placed with Foster Carers establish familial relationships and that by extending the placement via 'Staying Put' arrangements this would support their transition to adulthood.

What is a Staying Put Arrangement?

'Staying Put' supports young people leaving care to continue to live with their foster carer/s when they reach 18 years of age. The decision would be taken by the young person, the foster carer and Children's Services.

The Government guidance defines those young people who were an 'eligible child' or cared for and placed with a foster carer, can continue to live with that carer after 18 years of age.

An 'eligible child' is someone who is cared for by the Local Authority, is aged 16 or 17 years and has been cared for, for a total of at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 years. These young people are eligible for support as a care leaver. It doesn't matter how long the young person has been living with the foster carer, even if it is only for a short period of time, but it is important that when a child or young person moves to live with a foster carer, 'Staying Put' arrangements should be considered as a possibility for the future.

It doesn't matter whether the foster carer/s are Local Authority foster carer/s, family or friend foster carer/s, foster carers who receive a skill based payment to meet your needs or foster carer/s from an Independent Fostering Agency. There are certain restrictions in respect of Family or Friend Foster Carers in respect of Housing Benefit. Independent Fostering Agency Foster Carers will receive ongoing support in relation to the 'Staying Put' arrangement, and this would be provided by the Local Authority Fostering Team. It is therefore important that the Fostering Team is notified at an early stage, that is the 'Staying Put' Meeting.

As the young person's legal status would change following their 18th birthday that is they would no longer be 'cared for', the foster placement changes to a 'Staying Put' arrangement, with the young person effectively lodging in the carer's home, who becomes a landlord. Despite the change in the arrangements of the placement, the nature of the support and relationship between the young person and their carer will not change. The rules of the house will no doubt stay the same however consideration regarding additional issues will be required and this will be recorded in the Living Together agreement, which is addressed later in the guidance.

'Staying Put' arrangements can continue until the young person is 21 years of age or ceases to live in the household before that time. If the young person leaves the 'Staying Put' arrangement for any reason, they could return but this would impact the support provided. This is explained later in this guidance.

Rochdale has a duty to monitor and support all 'Staying Put' arrangements, including financial support.

The Foster Carer's Guide to 'Staying Put' arrangements explains the conditions required to extend a former fostering arrangement beyond a young person's eighteenth birthday, the associated financial implications, the social care requirements associated with extending former fostering arrangements and the consequential Income Tax, National Insurance and Welfare Benefit issues.

Rochdale MBC is committed to ensuring that the associated change from fostered young person to adult member of the household, and for the Foster Carer from Foster Carer to landlord (Staying Put Carer), should be carefully and sensitively planned in order to ensure that both the young person and the Carer/s understand the nature of the arrangement and that the positive aspects of being in foster care are not diminished by the new legal and financial arrangements and terminology.

Why should I be a 'Staying Put' Carer

Young people who 'Stay Put' are more likely to turn to their former foster carers for advice and support than those who did not, and have a wider network of people they could turn to for support. As a registered Foster Carer you play a significant role in supporting young people in respect of the issues identified above and towards adulthood and can continue to support them beyond their 18th birthday to ensure that they have the skills and maturity to move towards independence at a time that is right for them.

The Government Guidance clearly states that Foster Carers should not be precluded from becoming 'Staying Put' carers and should not be financially disadvantaged by doing so.

Training and support is available to Foster Carers in respect of supporting young people in their transition to adulthood and they are also supported via the Pathway Plan process, the carer's personal development plan and training and development portfolio and in reviews.

How is my Foster Carer Registration Affected?

You may continue to be a registered Foster Carer, either with or without cared for children and young people living in the household, or you may decide you no longer wish to be a Foster Carer. The Fostering Service will discuss these issues with you and ensure that you are clear on how your registration may be affected. The decision to be a 'Staying Put' carer will require a review of your approval which will be presented to the Fostering Panel in a timely manner.

You will continue to receive support in respect of the 'Staying Put' arrangement and ensuring that it continues to meet appropriate standards.

Planning a 'Staying Put' Arrangement

There are a number of stages which will address the possibility of a 'Staying Put' arrangement. The initial stage would be at the point of matching a young person with a Foster Carer, in order to provide both the young person and Foster Carer with the opportunity to continue their relationship beyond the young person's 18th birthday and provide the support required.

'Staying Put' arrangements do not always arise out of long term foster placements. Where a young person is placed with foster carer/s at 16 or 17 years, it is important to consider via the care planning processes whether a 'Staying Put' arrangement is a viable contingency option for them at 18 years and whether their needs would be best met through such an arrangement.

In order to decide whether a 'Staying Put' arrangement is what you and the young person wants, it is important that you get clear information at an early stage. This should be something that is discussed on a regular basis by your social worker and in review meetings.

Leaving Care Assessment of Need

The **Leaving Care Assessment of Need** (also known as **Pathway Plan Part 1**) is undertaken within three months of the young person's 16 birthday, or where the young person does not become cared for until after their 16th birthday, within three months of the date they became cared for, identifies the assistance and timescale required for young people to move to independence and, in the context of 'Staying Put', should be used as the framework for beginning to explore the issues identified above. The 'Staying Put' Meeting outlined below is held as part of the Leaving Care Assessment of Need.

Pathway Plan

The young person's social worker will complete the **Pathway Plan** (also known as **Pathway Plan Part 2**) following the Leaving Care Assessment of Need. The Pathway Plan is based on and includes the young person's Care Plan, and will include information about the young person's health and development, education, training and employment including their Personal Education Plan, their emotional and behavioural development, identity, contact with their family, friends and people they are close to, skills in relation to managing money, budgeting and opening a bank account, making sure that they are in 'suitable' accommodation and anything else that they may need support with, in preparing to be independent.

The Pathway Plan addresses the above issues against the young person's individual needs, how support and services will be provided and by whom, and indicate the timescales within which these will be provided. In order to address all aspects of the Pathway Plan, appropriate professionals will be involved in developing the plan. All those involved in developing the plan and who are named in it will receive a copy of the plan and following subsequent reviews.

The focus of the Pathway Plan is to support the young person in their transition to adulthood and independence. It is updated on a regular basis in order to meet the young person's changing needs. You will play a significant role in providing support to young people and therefore will play an important part in both the Leaving Care Assessment of Need and Pathway Plan.

Staying Put Meeting

To ensure sufficient time is available to make the necessary planning arrangements for extending a placement beyond a young person's 18th birthday, a Staying Put Meeting should be arranged by the young person's Social Worker and take place as part of the Leaving Care Assessment of Need (**Pathway Plan Part 1**). You will be supported in understanding the nature of Staying Put arrangement, by way of a discussion with your supervising social worker. This will establish whether a 'Staying Put' arrangement is viable and whether you and the young person are interested in a 'Staying Put' arrangement.

Where the meeting agrees that a 'Staying Put' arrangement is a positive option then the Pathway Plan will clearly reflect this plan and include the support to be provided. Subsequent LAC and pathway reviews will ensure that this is considered, and that the plans and support in place are working positively towards 'Staying Put'.

Any decisions made at this stage of the discussions are provisional and both the young person and the Foster Carer will have the opportunity to gain additional information, discuss the options with their allocated worker, and to address a change of circumstances.

Staying Put Progress Meeting

A Staying Put Progress Meeting will be arranged by the young person's Social Worker when the young person is around the age of 17 years, to establish how the young person has progressed and whether a Staying Put arrangement is still a viable plan. The Staying Put Progress Meeting can be undertaken as a Staying Put or Care Planning Meeting and should take place after the second to last LAC review before the young person's 18th birthday.

The Staying Put Progress Meeting will address the same issues identified in the Staying Put Meeting. Discussions will have been ongoing between the Staying Put and Staying Put Progress Meetings and this meeting will make sure that you are clear about the information shared and pull this together into a more formal agreement, for example in respect of financial support and a 'Living Together' agreement.

Living Together Agreement

All 'Staying Put' arrangements must be supported by a written agreement or a 'living together' agreement between the carer and their supervising social worker, the young person and their social worker and /or Personal Advisor. The written agreement covers the ground rules and expectations of all concerned.

It is important to remember that a great deal of the 'Living Together' agreement will probably have been in place prior to the 'Staying Put' arrangement. There may be some changes when the young person is no longer cared for and is legally an adult. The written agreement therefore should include what will stay the same and what, if anything will change.

Licence Agreement

The Licence Agreement, is specifically about the 'Staying Put' arrangement and clearly outline the date the agreement was formally agreed and started; who the agreement relates to; where the young person will reside; the cost of the arrangement per week; the young person's income; contributions from Children's Services; benefits paid in respect of the 'Staying Put' arrangement; notice period for ending the 'Staying Put' arrangement and specific agreements and expectations. The Licence Agreement will be signed by the Foster Carer, Young Person and Children's Services.

What happens next?

Once a decision has been made that a 'Staying Put' arrangement is a viable option, and the appropriate documentation has been completed and the young person's social worker has also agreed that this is in your best interests, they will present this to the Placement Panel following the Staying Put Progress Meeting. The Placement Panel will approve the 'Staying Put' arrangement once they are confident that everything has been considered and it is in the young person's best interests. They will set a further review period within 6 months of the young person becoming 18 years of age. The Placement Panel will send written confirmation of their decision.

Final LAC review prior to the young person's 18th birthday

The Independent Reviewing Officers will ensure through the care planning process that cared for children are aware of their options, and that their permanence plan sets out expectations for when the placement ends. The final review prior to the young person's 18th birthday will consider the information gathered during the Staying Put Meeting and Staying Put Progress Meeting, and ensure that the appropriate information, guidance and support has been provided and appropriate documentation has been completed. The IRO will invite the young person and the Foster Carer to express their views and wishes in respect of the 'Staying Put' arrangements and ensure that appropriate and sufficient support is in place.

Staying Put Arrangement Not Approved

A 'Staying Put' arrangement should not be agreed if it is not considered to be consistent with the young person's welfare. It will be rare for Children's Services not to support a 'Staying Put' arrangement. The Placement Panel will consider all potential 'Staying Put' arrangements even if the social worker is not recommending the arrangement. The young person has the right of appeal.

The young person and Foster Carer may decide that the young person will continue to reside in the former foster care placement. Rochdale MBC will not financially assist the young person or the carer where they do not support the 'Staying Put' arrangement however will continue to offer support and advice as per their leaving care duties and responsibilities.

Financial Arrangements and Support

Rochdale MBC is committed to supporting Foster Carers to engage with 'Staying Put' arrangements by providing financial support, which covers all reasonable costs of supporting the care leaver to remain with them, in line with the level of support they receive as a Foster Carer.

The 'Staying Put' allowance is based on the former foster placement rate, which would commence on the young person's 18th birthday, minus the pocket money and clothing allowance element, which would be replaced by the young person's entitlement to benefits or income. Not all young people will be entitled to a 'Staying Put' arrangement therefore Christmas / Festival payments, Birthday payment and Holiday payments will not be made to ensure equity with other care leavers.

The 'Staying Put' allowance will be funded from a number of sources including Children's Services, Young Person's contributions and Benefits. The allowance paid will contribute to the cost of the young person's accommodation, support, utilities, food and associated placement costs.

Where a foster carer has been paid a skills fee in respect of the young person, consideration will be given as to the ongoing needs of the young person and whether additional financial support is required to facilitate the placement where appropriate. It is not anticipated that the fees paid will continue as the young person remains in the arrangement and achieves stability and requires less support.

Independent Fostering Agency Foster Carers will be supported in considering 'Staying Put' arrangements in line with Local Authority and Relative Friend Foster Carers. The financial support would be in line with the Local Authority foster carer payments. Additional financial support could be considered as per the skills fees paid to other foster carers, however this must be on the basis of the young person's needs and it would not be anticipated that the additional support would be required as the young person remains in the arrangement and achieves stability and requires less support. Consideration may be given to whether the IFA carer could be registered as a Rochdale Carer or as a Supported Lodgings Scheme.

Where the young person is living away from home for example joined the armed forces or is attending University a retainer fee will be paid to the Foster Carer at 50% of the weekly payment. For young people in the army, this would be for the first three months of basic training. For young people in University, they may wish to return to their home community during holiday periods, and the carer will be supported for the duration of their course.

Guidance is available for young people to explain their entitlement to benefit entitlement including helpful website links. For detailed guidance in respect of Benefit entitlement, reference should be made to the Foster Carer's Guide. This covers guidance in respect of payments made by Children's Services, Housing Benefit entitlement, Council Tax entitlement and how you will be affected by the various rules and regulations.

Where young people remain living with their former foster carer/s under a "Staying Put" arrangement, Income Tax and National Insurance framework and liabilities apply. All foster carers and "Staying Put" carers must register as self-employed.

Staying Put Carers should ensure that they extend any insurance cover which was in place when they were Foster Carers. The Fostering Service will ensure that Staying Put carers are advised in respect of their household and car insurance policies, to ensure that this covers their particular circumstances.

Young People will be expected to contribute to their 'Staying Put' arrangement and the details of this is included in the Foster Carer's Guide. This guide also outlines the payments to 'Staying Put' Carers and who will be responsible for the various elements of the total payment.

All 'Staying Put' payments will be subject to an annual review.

Monitoring 'Staying Put' arrangements

All 'Staying Put' arrangements will be monitored and supported via the Pathway Plan which will include visits to the young person and 'Staying Put' Carer at an agreed frequency and review meetings will take place at least every 6 months. The Fostering Service will support the 'Staying Put' carer during this time and ensure that ongoing training, advice and guidance is available.

Ending a 'Staying Put' arrangement

The Living Together and Licence Agreement will clearly set out the arrangements for ending the 'Staying Put' arrangement and the length of notice required. The 'Staying Put' arrangement can continue until the young person is 21 years of age however the young person can leave at any time prior to that time with agreed notice.

If the 'Staying Put' arrangement ends prior to the young person's 21st birthday, following the notice period, the young person can return but it will no longer be considered as a 'Staying Put' arrangement and the support of the 'Staying Put' carer receives in respect of financial assistance will be affected.

Questions

You may have a number of questions following reading this guidance, and your supervising social worker will be able to help you.

Rochdale would like to support young people to leave care when they are ready and for Foster Carers to be supported in offering the support young people need by way of a 'Staying Put' arrangement and are happy to provide information and assistance to help make the decision that is right for you.

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