

From: **Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services**

Sarah Hammond, Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education

To: **Children and Young People's Cabinet Committee – 21 November 2023**

Subject: **Family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes**

Decision No: **23/00103**

Key: ***It affects more than 2 Electoral Divisions***

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Past Pathway
of report: **None**

Future Pathway
of report: **Cabinet Member Decision**

Electoral Division: **All**

Summary: The report provides an outline of a bid to DfE to use Lifelong Links work for young people planning independence from the care system. The outcome of the bid will be known in October and if successful funding would come through in November 2023. We are requesting ratification as this affects more than 2 Electoral Divisions

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for integrated Services on the proposed decision to

- i) accept the funding from the DfE to enable the delivery of the Family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes.
- ii) delegate decisions on the implementation to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education, or other Officer, as appropriate.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Lifelong Links Service is here for children in care to reconnect with key family members or friends who can support them into adulthood. The team work with young people in care, who do not plan to return to their family or be

adopted, to identify a group of safe adults who can commit to offering lifelong support for them.

- 1.2 The objective of the service is that the person in care leaves the system with a sense of belonging and identity, are provided with a network into adulthood, which will in turn prevent isolation and loneliness. The Lifelong Links service is run via the Social Connections Teams and is supported and accredited by Family Rights Group. (Please see attached Impact Reports for further information). Presently this offer is open to Children in Care but only funded for 50 pieces of work and aimed at those remaining in care.
- 1.3 The government has made £21million of funding available for Family Finding /Lifelong Links work via the DfE. KCC has submitted a bid for £715,000.00 to work with a minimum of 100 care leavers (*bid criteria is for 7- 10K per young person*). The bids focus is on leaving care plans – for Lifelong Links work to be offered to Care Leavers as they move towards independence. Lifelong Links work will support each referred young person with a plan of where to gain help and support for both practical and emotional issues. This offer will extend more widely than family and friends – with advocacy support and bring in the community to support them on their journey to adulthood.
- 1.4 The bid supports Kent’s strategic vision.
 - Improving services and outcomes for children in care and young adults who are care experienced through good and effective Corporate Parenting
 - All children in care and care leavers to be in stable accommodation, which they can call their home.
 - Improve access to community services for care leavers.
- 1.5 Kent is one of the largest and most experienced Social Connections Service (formally known as Family Group Conference (FGC) Service) running over 800 family meetings per year.
- 1.6 At present the Service comprises of 22 coordinators etc who provide 800 family meetings per year
- 1.7 If successful the funding will allow the service to expand to 5 coordinators and two apprentices. Ideally the apprentices will have care experience to work alongside the young people experiencing the Lifelong Links process. We also aim to work alongside Young Lives Foundations who will be able to provide advocates, mentors (we have included this in our funding application).

2. Financial Implications

- 2.1 If successful funding would be in place from November 2023 to 31st March 2025. All work will be formally evaluated by researchers, yet to be identified by DfE. This will measure the impact of the work undertaken.
- 2.2 The breadth of the bid has enabled us to cover all costs. For example, an extra coordinator was included to cover time spent training new coordinators so there

is no impact on the capacity of the service. Management costs are included alongside IT, travel, training and equipment costs.

2.3 Previous research into Lifelong Links identified savings (by Rees Centre, Oxford University) via a Cost Benefit Analysis that included 3 monetisable benefits (placement changes and missing episodes avoided and reunifications) the return on investment for Lifelong Links was shown to be 1.02.

2.4 This would add to our current service provision by reaching a wider cohort of young people leaving care and providing them with an improvement in the number of sustainable and supportive relationships they have and is attributable to better longer-term outcomes, and a reduction in mental health issues, isolation and loneliness. (See Impact Report attached) Reducing the cost to the public purse.

2.5 The money is divided into financial years.

	December 2023	March 2024
Total	245,866	469,828

3. Legal implications

3.1 If the application is successful, the LA will be expected to comply with the grant funding terms and conditions. Failure to comply with the terms and conditions will affect payment of the grant.

3.2 Grant funding will run until the end of March 2025. After the funding period ends, local authorities will be asked to continue to report outcomes until September 2025. This will allow the DfE us to gather information about how local authorities embed and sustain these programmes beyond the funding period.

4. Equalities implications

4.1 The proposed decision will have positive impact across all protected characteristics as it will provide further support from KCC to improve social connections for young people in care and provide them with clear support plans from their family and network (including friends and professionals). This can aid their sense of belonging and confidence in being able to manage their lives, and decision making. The process will be open to all young people in care. Including young people with disabilities, mental health issues, gender diversity, BME, including UASC. The process is inclusive placing each young person at the centre of the planning process, giving them a voice to identify who is important to them and what needs to happen for them to move into a positive adulthood.

4.2 It is anticipated this proposal will not have any adverse negative impact on the protected characteristics of our care leavers that KCC has responsibility for and aim to promote overall fairness.

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5. Risk and Other Factors

- 5.1 If we do not spend the monies there is a risk it could be requested to be returned if we cannot justify an underspend. There are no discussions with DfE yet re finance but we will be expected to continue open cases past March 2025 so it is feasible that flexibility may be negotiated.

6. Governance

- 6.1 Cabinet member decision will allow the Directorate to accept the grant funding for Social Connections service and delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education to ensure the required delivery related to the government funding is delivered.

7. Alternatives considered.

- 7.1 The DfE ambitions for reform are set out in *Children's social care: stable homes, built on love strategy and consultation*, put loving and stable relationships at the heart of children's social care. This includes the mission that, by 2027, every care-experienced child and young person will feel they have strong, loving relationships in place. If the LA did not apply for this grant we would not be able to enhance our services for the Care Leavers.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1 This bid provides a significant opportunity for Lifelong Links work to be extended to care leavers who are transitioning to independence. Giving them the opportunity to connect with those important to them (emotionally, socially, and practically) and keeping their voice central to that planning. Evidence shows connections and a sense of identity is improved by this work.

- 8.2 The funding breadth allows for support to be put around each young person in terms of advocacy and support from a care experience apprentice. The bid is comprehensive and covers all possible costs and impact on capacity.

- 8.2 The Social Connections Service who applied for this bid are experienced in Lifelong Links work, have a wealth of experience and are recognised nationally for the work they do.

9. Recommendation(s):

- i) accept the funding from the DfE to enable the delivery of the Family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes.
- ii) delegate decisions on the implementation to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education, or other Officer, as appropriate.

10. Background Document Web Links:

[Kent Impact Report](#)

[Lifelong Links evaluation report](#)

[Early career framework early adopters expression of interest form](#)

11. Contact details

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