

BECOME.

THE CHARITY FOR CHILDREN IN CARE
AND YOUNG CARE LEAVERS

Submission to the Ofsted consultation: Proposals for inspecting supported accommodation

September 2023

[Become](#) is the national charity for care-experienced children and young people. We put young people at the heart of everything we do, supporting them to get the help they need now and empowering them to bring about change in their own lives, the care system and society.

Introduction

Our response to this consultation has been informed by the views, insights and experiences of children and young people with lived experience of independent or semi-independent accommodation, which have been shared with Become through a number of participation activities and workshops that we have carried out or supported between 2021 and 2023.

This response builds on previous responses that we have submitted to consultations held by the Department for Education, in 2021 and 2023, into the proposed regulation of supported accommodation for 16- and 17- year olds. You can read our previous responses [here](#).

Key Messages

- We reject the Government’s proposals to introduce regulations for supported accommodation settings for 16 and 17 year olds that do not provide care in the strongest of terms. Establishing a separate set of standards and guidance for semi-independent settings will establish a two-tier care system for children aged 16 and 17. The Government’s plan to introduce this new regulatory regime is not in care-experienced children’s best interests, nor does it reflect what they tell us about the care and support they want to receive at this age.
- We are concerned that the Government’s proposed regulatory regime will legitimise and formalise the use of semi-independent accommodation for 16- and 17-year olds; and that the number and proportion of 16- and 17- year olds in care who are living in supported accommodation will continue to grow. In turn, this risks bringing the care cliff experienced by many young people leaving care forward from age 18 to age 16.
- We remain unconvinced that some of the proposed types of supported accommodation settings are at all appropriate in keeping children safe, and ensuring that their needs are identified and met. Moreover, semi-independent settings are not conducive to providing the stability, permanence, and supportive, loving and sustainable relationships that care-experienced children and young people need to recover, grow and thrive.
- We maintain that the inclusion of semi-independent settings within the existing children’s homes quality standards, with modifications where required, is the best way forward. This aligns with what children and young people tell us about how they want the level of care and support they receive at age 16 and 17 to be maintained whilst respecting their growing independence and autonomy.
- Consequently, we think that the Ofsted inspection framework for supported accommodation should mirror, as much as possible, the common core inspection framework for children’s homes, to ensure that there is parity between the way that the quality of accommodation and support provided to children living in supported accommodation is inspected, compared to their peers in other residential care settings. This means that inspection visits for supported accommodation, like for children’s homes, should be unannounced and that all providers of supported accommodation should be inspected at least annually.

Our response

1) To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal that inspections will lead to one of 3 outcomes?

Neither agree nor disagree

- 1.1 We agree in principle with the proposal that inspections of supported accommodation for 16- and 17- year olds should lead to one of three outcomes, as well as the proposed descriptors for each outcome. In particular, we are supportive of the omission of an ‘outstanding’ rating for supported accommodation. Given the variability in quality and safety that care-experienced children young people report across different supported accommodation settings we do not think it would be appropriate for providers to be rated as ‘outstanding’ under a provider-level inspection regime, where some of the accommodation delivered by a provider will never have been inspected, and the accommodation that has been inspected is only inspected every three years.
- 1.2 We understand the rationale for including more detailed descriptors of the different inspection outcomes than in the social care common core inspection framework¹ or other Ofsted inspection frameworks. However, the new inspection framework for supported accommodation will need to provide much clearer criteria for the different outcomes, particularly when a provider is responsible for multiple settings and there may be variable quality or standards across the different settings. Our strong recommendation would be that a provider should not receive the highest outcome unless there is substantial evidence that “consistently strong service delivery leads to typically positive experiences and progress for children” across **all** the settings that have been inspected. Likewise, if there is any evidence of “inconsistent quality of service delivery adversely affecting children’s experiences and limiting their progress” at any accommodation that a provider runs, it should not receive the highest inspection outcome.
- 1.3 We do, however, have a serious concern about the length of time between inspection visits that is proposed for providers that receive the best, or second-best, outcome assessment. For providers to be inspected every three years entrenches a two-tier system, leaving children living in supported accommodation with lower levels of protection and oversight than their peers who are living in children’s homes. Under a provider-level inspection framework many children will live in supported accommodation that is not inspected at all whilst they live there. We do not believe that the proposed frequency of inspections is sufficient to protect the rights of children who are already living in accommodation without care.
- 1.4 By comparison, full inspections of children’s homes are carried out at least annually, and children’s homes also have more regular independent oversight outside of inspection cycles, through the role of Regulation 44 visitors². We recommend that all providers of supported accommodation for 16- and 17- year olds should be inspected at least annually, with six-monthly inspections for those providers who receive the worst outcome assessments – to ensure parity

¹ Ofsted (2021), [Social Care Common Inspection Framework](#)

² Ofsted (2023), [Social Care Common Inspection Framework: children’s homes](#)

between the protections for children living in supported accommodation and those living in children's homes.

2) To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal to give 2 working days' notice of inspection to providers?

Disagree

- 2.1 We recognise the logistics required to organise an impactful inspection visit, particularly when inspectors are visiting multiple sites in different parts of the country. We are also pleased that Ofsted is giving a clear priority to ensuring that there are opportunities for children who are living in supported accommodation to be able to speak to inspectors and share their views and perspectives as part of inspections. We think it is essential that children's views constitute a significant part of inspections and that children are given time to decide about whether and how they would like to engage with inspectors.
- 2.2 However, we note that care-experienced children and young people have raised significant concerns about providers being given two days' notice ahead of a visit and the implications of this. Young people have raised concerns that with two days' notice providers may take measures to mask or conceal the realities of the setting, such as by putting in short-term fixes to long-term problems for the duration of the visit, or by removing certain children from being present to censor what is said to inspectors. Young people have raised concerns that this could lead to inspectors making an unrepresentative assessment of the quality and standard of the accommodation.
- 2.3 Another factor to consider is whether the quality of support provided to the children who are residents of the supported accommodation setting will reduce during the two-day notice period, as staff may be more focused on preparing for the inspection than providing support.
- 2.4 Inspection of children's homes under the common core framework are unannounced³. Again, we think it is important that there is consistency and parity between the inspection approaches for children's homes and supported accommodation, so that 16- and 17- year olds in supported accommodation do not receive a lower standard of oversight and accountability about the support they receive and places where they live than their peers in other care settings. We would advocate that inspections of supported accommodation should be unannounced in line with the approach taken for inspections of children's homes.
- 2.5 When finalising the inspection framework, Ofsted should give consideration to how the experience of living in supported accommodation during an inspection feels for care-experienced children, recognising that it effectively requires strangers to enter their home; as well as the ways in which this experience can be improved. One suggestion put forth by care-experienced young people was for residents to have access to the profiles of the inspectors who are coming into their home, so the children know exactly who is entering their home, and why; which could also help to rebalance the power dynamic.

³ Ibid

3) To what extent do you agree or disagree that these are the main things that will show us that children in supported accommodation have positive experiences and are making progress?

Agree

3.1 We think the proposed list of features includes the main things needed to assess the experiences and progress of children in supported accommodation.

3.2 Throughout our engagement with care-experienced children and young people, they have highlighted a number of additional features that they feel are important in ensuring that supportive accommodation is effective and provides a positive experience. We hope that Ofsted consider these when they finalise the inspection framework and evaluation criteria. They are listed below:

- The accommodation should provide a range of good quality facilities, including a range of working kitchen appliances, such as an oven and microwave, which are available to children at all times. Young people also recommended that basic food essentials, such as milk, eggs, bread and butter, should be available to all residents.
- The accommodation should be in a location that provides access to a range of local facilities, such as leisure activities, and is accessible, with strong public transport links. Young people felt that the location of the supported accommodation should also ensure that children living there feel safe, such as by being in a well-lit area with low crime levels.
- The accommodation should have a warm culture, ethos and living environment that supports children to feel at home. This could be achieved by the home not having an institutional appearance and including homely furnishings. Young people suggested that residents should receive a welcome pack when moving in with new bedding and other essentials, such as toiletries and towels. Young people also highlighted the importance of having somewhere that they could bring their family and friends to visit.
- The culture and ethos of the accommodation setting should be respectful and support children's identities, and religious or cultural needs, such as by providing places of worship and relevant equipment, such as access to a prayer mat, and respecting religious holidays.
- Children should be supported to develop practical life skills, ranging from cooking skills, to budgeting, and buying food and essentials. This can be done through group work as well as individually, so that young people can support and learn from each other when practising these skills.

3.3 We really welcome the inclusion of children having financial security being a main feature of effective supported accommodation. Young people leaving care often have more financial responsibilities at a younger age, through living independently, than their non-care-experienced peers and without the same financial support or financial familial safety net. This is particularly the case for 16- and 17- year olds in supported accommodation, who are effectively expected to be semi-independent before they reach adulthood. Young people have highlighted to us two specific ways in which they think supported accommodation providers and staff should support their financial security:

- Helping children in supported accommodation to develop their financial literacy and the skills, knowledge and confidence they need to be able to manage money as adults -

including how to open bank accounts, how to budget effectively and learning about different personal finance options; and

- Making sure that children have sufficient resources to ensure their basic needs are met, such as having money for travel costs and clothing. This could be achieved in different ways, including by supporting and enabling young people to access any financial support they are entitled to.

3.4 Another main feature of effective supported accommodation that we think should be strengthened within Ofsted's inspection framework is children's involvement in decisions that affect their lives – both regarding the support they receive on an individual level, but also about the broader processes, rules and culture within the supported accommodation setting. Providers should provide opportunities for children to share their views and feedback on the different elements of the supported accommodation, recognising that this is their home. Providers should have a clear feedback loop and be transparent about how these views and opinions are used, and the extent to which children can affect decision-making.

3.5 The care-experienced young people that we have heard from were pleased at the inclusion of good access to technology as a criterion for effective supported accommodation. Several young people have highlighted to us the challenges that they have faced in accessing reliable WiFi in supported accommodation, and the implications that this has had on their education, employment or training. Similarly, children can face specific barriers in securing mobile phone or broadband contracts, or even having access to TVs. All of this can lead to children being digitally excluded or disadvantaged compared to their peers; and missing out on informal education, connection to friends and family, or entertainment. In addition, some young people that we have heard from felt that supported accommodation providers should also take action to ensure that access to technology was safe for children, by installing parental WiFi settings, or building children's digital literacy so that they are aware of dangers and know how to be safe online.

4) To what extent do you agree or disagree that these are the main features of effective help and protection for children in supported accommodation?

Agree

4.1 We welcome the proposed main features of the judgement on how well children are helped and protected. However, there are a few omissions that we think it is important that Ofsted reflects in the evaluation criteria for the inspection framework:

- The use of CCTV or surveillance cameras in supported accommodation settings risks breaching children's right to privacy – article 16 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child.ⁱ We think it is important that the same standards that are applied in children's homes in relation to the use of CCTV are extended to supported accommodation settings: the use of CCTV should only be permissible at the direction of a court, or to safeguard an individual child's welfare.ⁱⁱ
- Children living in supported accommodation should know how to be able to raise concerns or complaints about their support or accommodation, and what will happen if they raise concerns. This includes understanding their rights to advocacy and how to obtain an advocate, how to raise concerns with senior managers employed by the provider, directly with the commissioning local authority, and with Ofsted. The provider should signpost to

independent and external sources of support and information, such as Become's [Care Advice Line](#).

- All staff should receive regular and high-quality training on de-escalation techniques, mental health and trauma-informed practice, to mitigate the risk of children being exposed to trauma or any events and experiences that could have a damaging impact on their mental health and emotional wellbeing.

4.2 Mobile and non-permanent settings, such as boats, barges and caravans, are inappropriate and wholly unable to meet the needs of children and young people aged 16 or 17, or to keep them adequately safe. Similarly, young people who we have spoken to have highlighted the risks and negative experiences that they have faced when living in shared accommodation, as children, with vulnerable adults: including alcohol or drug abuse; risky, sexualised or anti-social behaviour. It is important that the inspection framework and key lines of inquiry for inspections reflects and responds to the safety concerns that care-experienced young people have expressed about mobile and non-permanent settings, and shared accommodation settings where children live with older adults.

4.3 Through our engagement activities, care-experienced children and young people have highlighted some specific actions that they think providers of supported accommodation should take to enable children to feel and be safe. These are listed below, and we think that Ofsted should take these into account when finalising the evaluation criteria for the inspection framework for supported accommodation:

- Ensuring that every child has a safe space, and their own personal boundaries are respected. Children's bedrooms should generally be out of bounds to staff, unless they are invited in, or there is a legitimate safety concern, an emergency, or if the child is at risk.
- Staff should be trained and confident to support children with a range of issues and needs, including those related to their personal safety. This could include navigating personal and sexual relationships, managing drug and alcohol use, cooking, fire safety, security, financial safety, travel needs and online harms. Where children are living miles from home, staff should be able to provide support to enable them to keep in contact or reconnect safely with friends, family or communities that are miles away – both in person and online.
- Staff should receive relevant training so that they have a good understanding and are able to confidently accommodate and respond to different identity, cultural and religious needs. Some young people specifically highlighted the need for staff to have better training in relation to LGBTQ+ support, as well as ensuring that supported accommodation settings respected individual identities, for example having gender-neutral toilets if it is not possible for children to have individual bathrooms.
- Young people highlighted the need for clear rules and processes. For example, young people have told us about experiences of living in shared accommodation and not feeling as though they have any control over who visits communal areas – including stories of other residents having guests over and playing music loud into the night, when the child had exams the next day. There should be clear rules about who is able to visit communal areas, any curfews or restrictions, and how these policies will be monitored and enforced. Similarly, there should be clear rules about when a child might be deemed to be 'missing', compared to just being out late or late home.

5) To what extent do you agree or disagree that these are the main features of effective leadership and management of supported accommodation?

Agree

5.1 We think that the main features listed in the proposal document will enable Ofsted to assess the effectiveness of leaders and managers. However, there are some other features that we think Ofsted should consider when assessing the effectiveness of leaders and managers, including:

- The importance of children being involved in decisions that affect their day to day lives, and welfare – including how children will be meaningfully involved in decisions about the support that they receive, day-to-day living in the supported accommodation, and their level of autonomy.
- How the provider will support children to access a variety of activities that meet their needs, and develop and reflect their creative, cultural, intellectual, physical and social interests and skills – either through supported accommodation or within the wider community.
- How the provider will support children to meet their educational potential and to fulfil their aspirations in regards to education, training, skills and career development.
- The support that will be provided to identify and ensure that the health and wellbeing needs of children are met, including advice on healthy lifestyles, self-management, and connecting children to further advice, support and health services within the community as required.
- The support that will be provided in relation to care-planning, developing skills for independence, and identifying and fulfilling aspirations for adulthood.
- The support that will be provided to help children to develop, benefit from, and maintain sustainable long-term relationships based on mutual respect and trust.
- How change in the home will be managed and communicated to children living there, including change relating to the support provided in the home, changes in processes or changes in staffing.
- How leaders and managers ensure and assess whether there are positive, warm and trusting relationships between residents and staff.
- The extent to which children are aware of their rights and entitlements, including their right to advocacy, and whether there are any barriers to the realisation of these rights.
- Whether the supported accommodation provision provides a warm culture and homely living environment for children.
- The confidence that children and young people have in the organisation, management and staff providing their support and accommodation; whether the provider proactively seeks and listens to the views of children about how the service can be improved; and how the provider feeds back to young people about how their suggestions or opinions have been considered and responded to.

6) Do you have any other comments about our proposals for inspecting supported accommodation?

6.1 We recommend that the Ofsted inspection framework for supported accommodation for 16- and 17- year olds should make explicitly clear that providers are expected to respect, protect and fulfil children’s human rights, including all of the rights contained in the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child,⁴ which was ratified by the UK in 1991.

⁴ United Nations (1989), [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

6.2 We oppose the introduction of a regulatory regime for supported accommodation settings for 16- and 17- year olds that does not provide care. We are concerned that this will establish a two-tier care system for children aged 16 and 17, and does not reflect what care-experienced children and young people tell us about the care and support they want to receive at this age. Semi-independent settings are often not conducive to providing the stability, permanence, and supportive, loving and sustainable relationships that care-experienced children need to recover, grow and thrive.

6.3 The number and proportion of children in care aged 16 and 17 who are living in independent and semi-independent accommodation has consistently increased in recent years: the total number of children in care living in independent and semi-independent accommodation increasing by 44% between 2018 and 2022.⁵ We are concerned that the legitimisation and formalisation of semi-independent accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds through the new regulatory regime will lead to more and more children being moved into this type of accommodation, even if it is not in their best interests or able to meet all of their needs. We are particularly concerned that supported accommodation will be increasingly used for some specific groups of 16- and 17- year olds, such as children who have entered care as older teenagers, or children subject to immigration controls. On 31st March 2022, 69% of all unaccompanied asylum-seeking children aged 16 or 17 in care were living in independent or semi-independent accommodation.⁶ The number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children aged 16- or 17 living in independent or semi-independent accommodation increased by 60% between 2021 and 2022⁷, whilst the overall number of 16- and 17- year old unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in care increased by 36% in the same period.

6.4 We think it is important that through its thematic research and inspections of local authority children's services, Ofsted monitors and reports on whether the new regulatory regime for supported accommodation for 16- and 17- year olds leads to:

- More older teenagers being moved into supported accommodation, even when this is not in their best interest;
- An increase or reduction in the provision of supported accommodation across the country and different areas, and what impact this has on sufficiency.

6.5 In this submission, as well as other responses, we have raised specific concerns about the suitability and safety implications of some different types of supported accommodation provision: namely mobile settings, such as boats, barges and caravans, and shared accommodation where children may live with older adults. We think that Ofsted must remain cognisant of these specific risks throughout its role in registering and inspecting providers of supported accommodation; and should take appropriate action to ensure the safety and wellbeing of care-experienced children.

⁵ Department for Education (2022), [Children Looked After in England, including Adoptions](#)

⁶ Department for Education (2024), [Looked After Children Aged 16 to 17 in Independent or Semi-Independent Placements: Reporting Year 2022](#)

⁷ Figures taken from Department for Education (2024), [Looked After Children Aged 16 to 17 in Independent or Semi-Independent Placements: Reporting Year 2022](#) and Department for Education (2022), [Looked After Children Aged 16 to 17 in Independent or Semi-Independent Placements: Reporting Year 2021](#)

7) Please provide any representations/evidence of the impact of our proposals for the purposes of the Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010).

7.1 Evidence shows that children who share certain protected characteristics or experiences are at a disproportionate risk of being moved into independent or semi-independent accommodation at the age of 16 or 17. Snapshot data from the Department for Education showed that on 31st March 2022⁸:

- Almost half (44%) of children in care living in independent or semi-independent accommodation aged 16 or 17 were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children – this has increased significantly from 33.6% in 2021⁹;
- 73% of all children in care living in independent or semi-independent accommodation aged 16 or 17 were male;
- More than half of children in care living in independent or semi-independent accommodation aged 16 or 17 were from Black, Asian or other ethnic minority communities;
- 7% of all children in care living in independent or semi-independent accommodation aged 16 or 17 were disabled.

7.2 It is important that Ofsted carries out a comprehensive child rights impact assessment and equality impact assessment to assess whether the inspection framework for supported accommodation may have any potential disproportionate or negative impacts on the realisation of children’s rights, or on children who share protected characteristics, as well as other characteristics and experiences that are not protected by the Equality Act 2010, such as being subject to immigration controls. We think Ofsted should particularly consider the impact of the inspection framework on groups of children who are disproportionately likely to be living in supported accommodation by the age of 16 or 17.

7.3 It is imperative that the Ofsted inspection framework for supported accommodation, and inspections themselves, assesses whether supported accommodation provision:

- respects, protects and fulfils children’s human rights including to equality and non-discrimination;
- respects children’s religious, cultural and linguistic identities and heritage; and
- meets the holistic needs of children, including any access or communication needs.

7.4 Given the disproportionate and growing numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children aged 16 or 17 who are living in supported accommodation, we think that the inspection framework should more strongly underline the responsibility of supported accommodation providers in addressing the specific challenges that this group may encounter: such as providing translation or language support for children who are not fluent in English; and ensuring that children who are subject to immigration controls are receiving the requisite support to navigate the immigration system.

⁸ Department for Education (2024), [Looked After Children Aged 16 to 17 in Independent or Semi-Independent Placements: Reporting Year 2022](#)

⁹ Department for Education (2022), [Looked After Children Aged 16 to 17 in Independent or Semi-Independent Placements: Reporting Year 2021](#)

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ⁱ UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (1989), 'Convention on the Rights of the Child' [ONLINE] Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

ⁱⁱ Ofsted (2019), 'Surveillance and monitoring in residential childcare settings' [ONLINE] Available at: [Surveillance and monitoring in residential childcare settings - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/814242/surveillance-and-monitoring-in-residential-childcare-settings.pdf)