

Transformational investment in children's social care placements

Young people in care will be better protected thanks to measures announced today (15 December) to end unregulated provision – stamping out poor quality supported accommodation providers and rooting out bad practice.

These include [mandatory national standards](#) for supported accommodation housing 16 and 17-year-olds and a new regime of robust accountability from Ofsted – all backed by £142 million over three years to level up the outcomes of young people in or leaving care.

It will also include additional places created in new or refurbished children's homes, in the largest package of children's social care placements since 2010. This will benefit children whose complex needs make them more vulnerable to exploitation or harm, thanks to a £259 million settlement at the Spending Review.

These additional places will be in both secure homes, for children who may be a harm to themselves or others, and in open homes, for children who cannot live with their families and require dedicated support and care.

Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi said:

Excellent children's social care has never been more vital. We cannot – and will not – accept poor quality or unsafe accommodation for children in our care, who are often among the most vulnerable in our country. That's why I have asked Ofsted to take action against poor quality or rogue providers of supported accommodation, some who value profit above the needs of the young people they look after, tarnishing the reputation of the thousands of dedicated people working in social care.

By providing more young people with safe, secure places to live, through this first phase of capital investment in children's homes, we will give them the tools they need to move confidently into adult life.

These reforms represent a new chapter for children's social care, which alongside the ongoing independent review, will truly level-up outcomes for those most in need.

The introduction of mandatory national standards for supported accommodation for older children and a programme of Ofsted-led registration and inspection follows extensive consultation. The [first consultation](#) gave a clear verdict to introduce these measures and in September this year a ban on placing under-16s in this kind of provision came into force.

It means that from 2023 all providers of accommodation for children in care or care leavers up to the age of 18 will be regulated by Ofsted, in a move aimed at stamping out poor-quality practice including among those acting without the best interests of vulnerable young people in mind.

While the new accountability framework is developed by Ofsted, local authorities will continue to be held to account by Ofsted where they do not meet their duty to provide safe, secure placements where children are not placed at risk – including in supported accommodation for 16 and 17-year-olds.

The standards will focus on improving leadership and management, protection, accommodation and support, with a focus on identifying risk, fostering healthy relationships between staff and the young people in their care, and giving young people more say in the support they receive.

HM Chief Inspector at Ofsted Amanda Spielman said:

We know that for some looked after children and care leavers, supported accommodation can be the right choice as they move into adult life. But although there are some examples of excellent support, this just isn't consistent across the board.

New standards and oversight are absolutely necessary, so I'm pleased that Ofsted has been asked to develop a regulatory system and inspection framework for supported accommodation. All young people deserve to live somewhere they feel happy and safe, which is why we are developing a system that places the interests of young people at its heart.

The new measures to raise outcomes in children's social care come in the wake of two high-profile deaths, those of six-year-old Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson, 16 months. These cases strengthen the Government's resolve to take urgent action that helps prevent abuse or neglect while also improving the quality of care provided to children who cannot live with their birth families.

The Education Secretary has commissioned a [national review](#) into the details of Arthur's death, to be led by the [National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel](#). This will identify learnings from the case for local and national government, as well as those working in the police, health and education sectors.

Alongside this, Ofsted has also been commissioned to lead a [Joint Targeted Area Inspection](#) with other relevant inspectorates to look at where improvements are needed in Solihull, in response to Arthur's case, with a focus on the point at which a child becomes known to services. A Commissioner appointed by the Department for Education is already working in Bradford, where Star died, to assess its capability and capacity to improve children's services – this work will conclude in January, as will the ongoing Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review.

From the package of £259 million for children's homes, an initial £12 million over the next year will start a programme to create new places and support provision in secure children's homes in all nine regions of England, including for work to create new units in London and the West Midlands where there is currently no secure provision for young people who need safe, therapeutic environments. It will be the first in several phases of capital investment up to 2025, and also creates new 'step-down' places to support children to move out of secure accommodation safely and back into the community when they are ready.

As well as new places in secure homes, additional places in other children's homes will also be created over the same time period, the first wave of which follows a match-funded round of bids in July led by the Department for Education.

Successful projects will be confirmed shortly, to provide accommodation for vulnerable young people with a variety of different needs, including those at risk of criminal or sexual exploitation, those who that require emergency or crisis placements and those that need transitional places as they move out of a secure welfare or justice unit.

The secure and 'step down' places announced today include:

- £2.1 million for the North West, to expand two existing homes in St Helens and Salford, creating 10 extra beds;
- £1.1 million for the North East, to create extra beds in two existing homes in Durham and Northumberland;
- £1.1 million for Yorkshire, including five refurbishment projects in Sheffield;
- £3.5 million for the East Midlands, to rebuild an existing home in Lincolnshire and refurbish a home in Nottinghamshire, creating six additional beds and six new step-down places;
- £1.2 million for the East of England, including seven refurbishment projects in Peterborough;
- £800,000 for the South West, including seven refurbishment projects in Devon; and
- £900,000 for the South East, including refurbishment work to an existing home in Hampshire.

In addition, funding will be provided to consortia in both London and the West Midlands to begin work required to create secure children's home provision in both of those regions.

Denise Hatton, Chief Executive of the YMCA England & Wales said:

We are delighted to see the introduction of new national standards for supported accommodation to ensure that young people receive the support they need to have a safe and supportive place to live.

YMCA provides 8,800 beds each night and connects more than 20,000 vulnerable people every year with caseworkers and support across

our accommodation programmes, hostels and foyers. By providing young people with a tailored support system, we aim to empower them to gain the skills and confidence necessary in order to move on and live independently.

Ensuring that young people's needs are correctly met, and that there is better clarity to providers and local authorities on the remits of supported accommodation is vital to ensure services are provided to a high standard.

We look forward to working closely with the Department for Education to build clear and robust guidance for best practice, that allows for the benefits of flexible and tailored support models, and ensures that the sector meets and strives for high-quality settings for every young person.

Rachel Ledwidge, director of supported accommodation provider Moving On, said:

We very much welcome the Government's plans to reform the use of previously unregulated semi-independent provision by introducing new national standards.

Providers of this type of accommodation should have a benchmark in the quality of services that are delivered to young people. This will ensure that those who are providing a good quality service will be accredited and recognised and those who fall short, will need to improve. Young people should be given the best opportunities they can to maximise their life chances and these services involved in delivering this support are invaluable in helping them to achieve it.

We look forward to continuing to work with the Department for Education as they build this new regime.

The Department for Education will work closely with care experienced young people, councils, the Association of Directors of Children's Services, care providers, children's advocacy groups and charities to refine the new national standards before these are published on a 'for information' basis in early 2022, ahead of laying the regulations for the standards and Ofsted's registration and inspection framework in the summer. They will become mandatory from Autumn 2023.

The Education Secretary has [written](#) to Ofsted Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman to confirm the new measures, including investment from the Spending Review worth £17 million between April 2022 and March 2025 to build up the capacity and capability to deliver the new system of regulation and inspection. A further £121 million from the overall settlement for these reforms will be distributed to councils to cover the cost associated with introducing the national standards.

The Department for Education will also invest an additional £1.25 million from the Spending Review settlement to help ready the sector for the reforms. The names of successful open children's homes projects being announced today will be confirmed in due course, as will final numbers of places in secure children's homes being created as work continues.