

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.

[PM opening statement at COVID-19 press conference: 15 December 2021](#)

Good afternoon everybody,

as of today, every eligible adult in England can use the national booking service

to Get Boosted Now.

If you're over 18 and had your second jab at least three months ago, then you can get jabbed right now.

And it's absolutely vital that you do.

Because the wave of Omicron continues to roll in across the whole of our United Kingdom,

with over 78,000 Covid cases today, the highest ever daily number reported,

and the doubling rate of Omicron in some regions is now down to less than two days.

And I'm afraid we are also seeing the inevitable increase in hospitalisations,

up by 10 per cent nationally week on week

and up by almost a third in London.

But we are also seeing signs of hope,

because since we launched our Emergency Omicron appeal on Sunday night

a great national fight back has begun

and people have responded with an amazing spirit of duty and obligation to others.

And I want to say that each and every one of you who rolls up your sleeve to get jabbed is helping this national effort.

And I want to thank everyone who has come forwards,
whether you've had to queue around the block at a walk-in centre,
or whether you've booked online.

And, of course, on behalf of the whole country,

I want to thank our NHS, our GPs our pharmacists, who with barely a day's
notice – 48 hours' notice, have so accelerated the programme that we began
this week

with the biggest Vaccination Monday ever in England

and yesterday the biggest booster day yet, with more than 650,000 boosters
delivered across the whole UK.

And across the country, after all they have been through, those teams are
going to keep going through Christmas and beyond.

Jab heroes like

Kim Kirk, leading the King's Mill hospital vaccination hub in Mansfield,

who was asked a year ago to do it for four weeks and has been doing it ever
since, with 180,000 jabs and counting.

Dr Laura Mount and the team at Central and West Warrington PCN, who have been
organising pop-up vaccination clinics for the homeless.

Or the team at Home Park in Plymouth who have been regularly jabbing until
2am, because they just carry on for as long as there are people there wanting
a booster.

And I want to thank those from every walk of life who are stepping forward to
support them.

The military personnel deployed across every region of the country,

including an additional 100 in Scotland from yesterday –

as well as 2,500 firefighters.

And since Sunday night, we've seen more than 20,000 new volunteers signing up
to help with the booster effort as stewards,

taking the total number to almost 33,000.

With every day we're expanding the ranks of these healthcare auxiliaries,

an emerging Territorial Army of the NHS –

in a race against time to get those jabs in arms and save lives.

And if you're watching this and you want to get involved,

just visit the website nhsvolunteerresponders.org.uk

and do something this Christmas that you can tell your grandchildren about many Christmases from now.

In total, we've now boosted more than 45 per cent of all adults in England, including more than 88 per cent of those aged 70 and over,

And while hospital admissions are going up,

nationwide we are starting to see admissions coming down among some of the more vulnerable older age groups where we have already got those boosters in arms.

From tomorrow, we're speeding things up even further by removing the 15 minute post-vaccination waiting time.

And while we're at it, from Monday, 12 to 15 year olds can book in for a second jab.

And we know how crucial it is to keep children in school,

so let's all make sure our children and young people are vaccinated before they go back next term.

As we take forward our national mission, we are of course supporting similar efforts by the Devolved Administrations,

which are also rapidly increasing vaccination rates across Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

A COBR meeting with Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast is taking place this evening.

But already the pace of rollout across the four nations is such that the UK as a whole now has twice as many boosters per head as the EU

and more than twice as many as the United States.

So let's keep going.

Let's carry on giving Omicron both barrels.

Let's slow its spread and give the vaccines more time

Wear face masks indoors

Use ventilation

Get tested if you're going to an event where you're likely to meet lots of people

And get tested if you're going to meet elderly and vulnerable relatives.

And we're helping to get you the tests that you need

I want to thank the Royal Mail who are doubling home deliveries of testing kits to 900,000 a day from Saturday.

So let's slow down Omicron's spread

And at the same let's reduce the harm Omicron can do to us by building up our vaccine defences.

We're jabbing in hospitals, we're jabbing in surgeries,

We're jabbing in pharmacies and in pop-up centres,

We're jabbing in shopping centres and on high streets

and in football stadiums – with mass events planned at Stamford Bridge and Wembley this weekend and daily “jabbathons” at Elland Road in Leeds.

We're throwing everything at it.

Wherever you are, we'll be there with a jab for you.

So please Get Boosted Now.

Thank you very much.

[Breaking it down: UKHSA scientist makes Nature's top 10 of 2021](#)

Chosen by Nature's editors, [the top 10](#) explores key developments in science and recognises individuals who, along with their colleagues, helped to make amazing discoveries and bring attention to crucial issues.

Meaghan has been recognised for helping to disseminate crucial information about coronavirus (COVID-19) by breaking down the agency's scientific reports into easy-to-understand social media posts. After spending her first 10 years at Public Health England (PHE) tracking HIV, Meaghan was drafted into the COVID-19 response in 2020.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA, formerly PHE) has brought together the UK's unparalleled expertise across genomics, epidemiology and virology to monitor and better understand SARS-CoV-2 variants. By regularly publishing detailed technical briefings, the latest data and understanding of the virus is made freely available to the

rest of the world.

Scientific data is complex by nature, and it was Meaghan's ability to distil and present the cutting-edge findings into accessible content on Twitter that has secured her place on the top 10 list, alongside the scientist who placed a rover on Mars, and a former UN special rapporteur credited with protecting the rights of indigenous communities across the world.

Speaking as the list was published, Meaghan said:

I'm very humbled to be included and it's a huge honour to be recognised. Behind the many reports we publish is a large team of scientists working at pace around the clock. Back in January I was inspired to showcase our collective work, to breakdown the findings for an unscientific audience and it quickly became clear that people valued the insight.

My day job is still very much focused on understanding how coronavirus behaves and to provide the scientific basis on which public health decisions are made, to find a way through this unprecedented challenge and to protect as many lives as possible.

In my spare time, I'll continue to help people understand the science and make informed decisions. The best advice I can give now is to go out and get the vaccine, whether that's a first, second or booster shot.

Dr Susan Hopkins, Chief Medical Advisor at UKHSA, added:

I'm incredibly proud that Meaghan's commitment to communicate the science is being celebrated in this way. I know that all the scientists and researchers working at UKHSA during the pandemic are delighted at this recognition. Shining a light on their work, her posts have been both a great source of information and reassurance for members of the public and the media.

[UKHSA ramps up testing availability following record week for distribution](#)

The UK's testing programme is the biggest in Europe with nearly 400 million tests carried out to date, twice the number in France and more than 4 times the number in Germany. So far this week around 400,000 test kits have been delivered to people's homes each day to help combat the spread of coronavirus

(COVID-19).

By Saturday 18 December, 900,000 deliveries a day will be made to ensure that even more people can order either a PCR or LFD test directly to their home.

As well as the rapid expansion in delivery capacity to people's homes, UKHSA is also increasing test availability at pharmacies, PCR testing sites and local authorities.

More lateral flow tests will be available across the UK in local community pharmacies to collect. Pharmacies are now able to access 10.5 million lateral flow tests per week, an increase of 5.5 million tests per week.

Booking slots for PCR testing sites will also increase by up to 100,000 per day from tomorrow (Thursday 16 December), especially in areas where booking slots have been filled.

To ensure a good testing supply over the coming weeks, UKHSA is working to secure hundreds of millions more LFD tests and an increase in PCR laboratory testing capacity of up to 150,000 tests per day.

UKHSA chief executive Dr Jenny Harries said:

We are very grateful to the public for stepping up and ordering tests to identify cases and protect themselves and others.

Now, this huge operational effort will mean that almost one million people will benefit from ordering COVID-19 tests directly to their homes, every day. I want to thank everybody at the Royal Mail for their incredible response helping us deliver this massive effort at their busiest time of the year.

Vaccination remains critical to help us bolster our defences against becoming severely ill – please remember to get your first, second, third or booster life-saving jab without delay to protect yourself, your families and your communities.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

Our testing programme is the biggest in Europe and we know that demand for tests is growing further with the arrival of the Omicron variant.

I'm delighted that Royal Mail is expanding our distribution service which will mean over 900,000 PCR and LFD test kits can be delivered to homes across the country every single day.

It's vital we all play our part in the national effort to tackle Omicron by getting tested if we have symptoms and using LFDs daily if we're a close contact of a case.

Nick Landon, Chief Commercial Officer at Royal Mail, said:

Royal Mail is proud to support the NHS with the collection and delivery of test kits across the whole of the UK, as we have since the start of the pandemic.

We have been in regular contact with UKHSA regarding the increased demand for test kits this week and are extending capacity at their request.

We continue to prioritise test kits for delivery and collection daily including the 35,000 priority postboxes and Sunday collections from over 15,000 priority postboxes.

Further information on the number of LFD and PCR tests carried out daily are published on the [COVID-19 dashboard](#).

100 more military personnel to support Scotland's vaccine rollout

This brings the total number of personnel supporting this effort to 221.

121 personnel have been supporting the vaccine programme across Scotland since early October, and the boosted cohort of personnel are expected to be on task until the end of February 2022.

Alongside supporting the accelerated vaccine programme, 114 Armed Forces personnel are driving ambulances in support of the Scottish Ambulance service. As of today, this support will be extended until the end of March, with 96 personnel remaining on task to provide this life saving service.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

Our Armed Forces continue to tirelessly support the Covid-19 vaccination programme in Scotland to give people and communities vital protection against this virus.

This uplift in support will help to get more vaccines into arms faster, working shoulder to shoulder with the dedicated health services.

The 221 personnel supporting the vaccine programme includes health care professionals and general duties personnel who will be working in support of

NHS Scotland staff and volunteers, administering vaccines and providing planning expertise.

Personnel on task come from units across the three services – Royal Navy, British Army and Royal Air Force. Some of those deploying have been active on other tasks in Scotland since the pandemic began including community testing.

Scottish Secretary Alister Jack said:

Once again our fantastic British Armed Forces are stepping up in times of need to help tackle Covid-19 in Scotland and across the UK and I pay tribute to them.

The deployment of a further 100 personnel will make a significant contribution to getting people vaccinated in Scotland. As the festive season approaches, when we want to spend time with loved ones, it's more important than ever to be protected. I urge everyone to book their jabs as soon as they are eligible.

The military has been front and centre in communities here from the very start of the pandemic – and will continue to be so amid a surge in Omicron infections. With 221 personnel assisting the vaccine effort, another 114 driving ambulances and others providing further support to the NHS in Scotland, we are incredibly fortunate in the UK in having such committed, skilled and willing Armed Forces to support us in such challenging times.

There are now 398 personnel available to support on Operation Rescript tasks in Scotland, the operational name given to Defence's work to support the pandemic response across the UK. This includes around 60 personnel supporting NHS Lanarkshire hospitals.

Support is being provided through the Military Aid to the Civil Authorities (MACA) process. Since March 2020, Defence have responded to over 430 MACA requests across the UK.

Brigadier Ben Wrench, Commander Joint Military Command Scotland said:

Whether it be responding to the impacts of storms or national health crises, the members of our Armed Forces are always prepared to deploy at short notice to support the nation and our communities.

I commend the dedication of all those serving and supporting this effort, many of whom will find themselves away from their families and loved ones this Christmas and Hogmanay.

The Armed Forces stand ready to step up and support civil authorities, devolved nations and communities as required in the coming months where the

requests meet the MACA principles.

Recently, Defence deployed 134 personnel at short notice to support Aberdeenshire Council conduct welfare checks on vulnerable people and isolated communities impacted by Storm Arwen.