On your own now:

the risks of unsuitable accommodation for older teenagers

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Acknowledgements

A number of people need to be thanked for their contributions to this report. Most importantly our thanks go to the accommodation providers who responded to our survey, the young people who shared their experiences and Emmanuel Oloruntola who helped us analyse much of the data. Thanks should also go to the National Practitioner Support Service, Homeless Link, Centrepoint, DePaul UK, St Mungo’s Broadway, St Basil’s and the National Housing Federation for comments, guidance and assistance. Finally our thanks to colleagues across The Children’s Society for all their excellent work and support in producing this report.
Foreword

It’s known as an awkward age, but thousands of the most vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds are being plunged into seriously dangerous living situations, fraught with the very risks that they need to escape.

Local authorities have a duty to keep all children safe up to the age of 18 but more than 8,000 16 and 17 year olds across the country are currently being provided with care and accommodation that may be unsuitable.

The Government and local authorities risk failing these vulnerable teenagers as their safety and life chances are put into jeopardy. Some young people tell us they are living in accommodation that is violent, where they see drug use and feel at risk of sexual exploitation.

The vast majority of these 16 and 17 year olds are likely to have experienced abuse, neglect or family breakdown in their earlier childhoods and need intense support. Many are looked after children or care leavers, but lots are outside the formal care system and get little or no support. Because of their awkward age, they are too often being treated as grown-ups and left to fend for themselves.

And unlike their peers of the same age in foster or residential care, these 16 and 17 year olds live in accommodation that is not regulated to the same standards or consistently inspected by Ofsted. Similarly, half of 16 and 17 year olds in this form of accommodation have no social worker, and providers told us that many struggle to fend for themselves financially.

In the worst cases, teenagers who get caught up in the trouble are evicted from this, their last ‘home’, and fall through the cracks between childhood and adulthood with nowhere to go. One in 10 16 and 17 year olds were evicted last year, left at risk of becoming street homeless with all offers of support withdrawn.

Whilst our research did uncover some good practice it is clear that standards in the support and accommodation provided to 16 and 17 year olds who cannot live at home varies significantly across England. This is a complex system bridging child and adult services and often the components of the system struggle to talk to one another and work together. Less than two-thirds of the accommodation needed was procured in advance by local authorities in the last year and accommodation providers are not always being integrated into existing structures to safeguard children.

These final childhood years are critical in a young person’s development into a confident and independent adult and this is particularly so for those vulnerable teenagers who have experienced abuse and neglect. But they are being led to a crisis, systematically let down by the very organisations that should be protecting them.

That’s not just awkward, it’s seriously awkward. This is why we have written this report, to expose these failings and make the case for change. And you can join us in this by becoming part of our Seriously Awkward campaign and its call to provide better protection for vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds.

Matthew Reed, CEO
The Children’s Society

childrenssociety.org.uk/seriouslyawkward
Executive summary

16 and 17 year olds who cannot live at home with their families are very vulnerable and need a great deal of support and care if they are going to be able to enter adult life positively. Living away from family at the age of 16 would be a challenging experience for any young person and it is so for many young people in the care of their local authority because of their earlier experiences of abuse, neglect and family conflict which often make them less well-equipped to survive on their own.

The rules state that these children should become looked after children and are entitled to the full support of local authority children’s services but this report demonstrates how this is not always the case in practice. Last year local authorities were responsible for at least 8,400 young people aged 16 or 17 who could no longer live at home. This number includes existing looked after children of that age, but also includes 16 and 17 year olds entering the care system, other 16 and 17 year olds who stopped being looked after to become care leavers and many young people accommodated by their local authority because they found themselves at risk of homelessness.

These young people, all vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds, are treated very differently. They each have a different set of entitlements and have very different experiences. Whilst some receive the full set of entitlements due to care leavers and looked after children others do not. Our report earlier this year, Getting the house in order, exposed the fact that two-thirds of homeless 16 and 17 year olds who are offered accommodation are not given looked after status thus denying them the support they need to navigate through their late adolescent years.

Alongside varying support there are also varying types of accommodation. Whilst some of these young people will be in stable foster placements many more find themselves living in provision designed to prepare them for adult life with varying degrees of support. Living outside the family and with little supervision, this accommodation can expose them to further risks like being exploited for sexual or criminal purposes, abusing drugs and alcohol, deteriorating mental health, getting in to financial trouble and more.

This accommodation is not consistently inspected by Ofsted and there are only minimal standards outlining how providers and local authorities should meet the needs of 16 and 17 year old children living in these arrangements. Whilst local authorities can choose to put in place robust quality frameworks through their commissioning arrangements our research shows that practice across England varies considerably, with some young people telling us they are experiencing good provision and others describing their struggle to cope – with little support and in surroundings that are not conducive to their development as confident and independent adults.

If they are to overcome the risks they encounter and thrive, 16 and 17 year olds need both quality support and quality accommodation. Their status and where they are placed should not be detrimental to their life chances. This report however finds that in many places the different components of the system are not working together and that many young people still receive care and accommodation that falls short. At the worst, 16 and 17 year olds can find themselves living in poverty, surrounded by other chaotic young adults, in environments where they can be exposed to violence and drugs. Faced with these challenges they are prone to crises and their problems can escalate.

This does not have to be the case and this report pays particularly close attention to the ways in which accommodation providers, local authorities and other agencies are working together to ensure that the young people in their care are properly safeguarded and supported.
The report is based on an analysis of the sufficiency strategies of 102 local authorities, a survey with 118 providers of accommodation in 83 local authorities in England and focus groups with 11 young people who have experience of living in accommodation designed to prepare them for independence at the age of 16 or 17. Throughout the report we have used case studies from The Children’s Society’s direct work with young people who needed support with their housing needs when they were aged 16 or 17.

The report makes the case for change in how vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds who cannot live at home with their families are supported and cared for. It argues that the complicated variety of different provisions for looking after these young people combined with support, care and living arrangements that are not subject to enough scrutiny by the state have resulted in a situation which is damaging young people lives in ways that stay with them well into adult life. It is a call for national and local government, accommodation providers and a range of other agencies and organisations to come together to ensure we provide high quality and guaranteed support so that these 16 and 17 year olds can thrive.

‘She wasn’t perfect, and I wasn’t perfect… but without her teaching me [independent living skills] I don’t think I would have managed.’

Care leaver

‘They sent me to a hostel, it has made me a worse person. My experience is that hostels are full of drug users... I don’t want to be in that situation’

Care leaver
Key findings

In this report we present new data looking at the support and accommodation offered to 16 and 17 year olds who can no longer live at home. Our findings focus on the risks these vulnerable young people face, the support they receive, how they are safeguarded, local authorities’ forward planning when commissioning these types of services and critically how things change when they turn 18.

Risk

Our survey of accommodation providers found that the risks facing 16 and 17 year olds living outside a family unit can be high.

■ Misuse of substances like legal highs, alcohol and illegal drugs are judged to be the most severe risks to 16 and 17 year olds by accommodation providers. The substances of most concern were legal highs, judged to be a high risk to young people by 63% of providers.

■ Providers are also highly concerned about the mental health of the 16 and 17 year olds in their care. Nine in every 10 providers judged mental health to be a medium or high risk to the safety and wellbeing of the young people in their care.

■ Young people can be placed in very chaotic environments. We estimate that providers are dealing with an average of 13 violent incidents every year and that they are likely to be requesting the help of local police forces to help them cope with violent incidents. The involvement of the police can risk the criminalisation of children.

■ The vast majority of 16 and 17 year olds in this type of accommodation are likely to be living in poverty despite the fact that they should be financially supported by children’s services. 82% of providers reported that three quarters, or more, of the 16 and 17 year olds in their care were in receipt of state benefits and high levels of debt and rent arrears are common.

■ We estimate that every year 12% of 16 and 17 year olds in this accommodation are being evicted, or subject to an ‘unplanned move’. These evictions put them at risk of becoming ‘intentionally homeless’ and could leave them with no-one to turn to. Only 8% of providers stated that they would never evict a 16 or 17 year old child.

■ Two fifths of the respondents to our survey told us that they had seen 16 and 17 year olds evicted from their accommodation being rehoused in bed and breakfast style accommodation that had been block-booked by local authorities and therefore was no longer available to the general public. The Secretary of State for Education has made it clear that bed and breakfasts are unsuitable for children.
Local authorities

Each local authority is required to produce a 'sufficiency strategy' to ensure sufficient accommodation for looked after children. Our analysis of these strategies found a lack of rigour in the way accommodation placements for 16 and 17 year olds are being planned.

- There is widespread failure among local authorities to plan sufficient accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds. 30% of local authorities are failing to put figures on the number of looked after 16 and 17 year olds in their care and 72% are failing to adequately consider other groups at risk like homeless young people. The lack of rigour in strategies means that on average local authorities only commission 62% of the accommodation they might need and are relying on more expensive spot purchasing practices to find emergency beds when their planned provision is full.

Support

- Accommodation providers told us they were commissioned to provide all sorts of support for 16 and 17 year olds to help them sustain their tenancy.
- Providers make frequent contact with the police and were more likely to be in contact with the job centre on behalf of their 16 and 17 year olds than they were with local schools and colleges.
- Levels of support provided to young people varied. Two-thirds of providers felt they were commissioned to provide the right amount of support for the 16 and 17 year olds in their care. 11% felt that, for those with the lowest needs, they were not commissioned to provide enough support. Providers told us that approximately 2% of 16 and 17 year olds living in this accommodation received no support at all.

Safeguarding

- Accommodation providers are unlikely to be integrated into local structures designed to safeguard children.
- Whilst key safeguarding procedures appear to be in place, half of providers are employing staff with no formal training or qualifications to care for vulnerable children and young people. 55% of providers reported that children’s services did not include them in planning support for the young people in their care.
- 22% of respondents had no contact with their local authority for safeguarding and 30% of providers have no contact with their local safeguarding children boards (LSCBs).

Turning 18

- Providers worry about what happens to the 16 and 17 year olds in their care when they turn 18.
- Providers told us that support for these vulnerable young people decreases significantly when these young people turn 18 – regardless of whether or not they are ready for independence. 61% of providers told us that the young people they care for lose the vital support they need to succeed.

‘[another resident] threw a sofa over and slapped a member of staff in the face.’

Looked after child
Key recommendations

Below are our key recommendations. You can find the recommendations in full at the end of this report.

Joint guidance on 'Provision of accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds who may be homeless and/or require accommodation'

- The Secretaries of State for Education & Communities and Local Government must review and update the 2010 guidance, now five years old, on accommodating homeless 16 and 17 year olds. This update should include provisions to ensure:

  - that children who refuse to become looked after can change their mind
  - that Children Act assessments are carried out every time a child accommodated outside section 20 is evicted or subjected to an unplanned move
  - that the ban on bed and breakfast is reinstated in full.

The Department for Education

- The government should introduce a regulatory framework for this type of accommodation. This should be inspected against by Ofsted. The framework should be written following extensive consultation. In the short-term the department could consider a sector-wide practice improvement programme or stronger statutory guidance.

- For those 16 and 17 year olds who refuse to become looked after the Secretary of State for Education should create a new status of a ‘vulnerable 16 of 17 year old’ which would allow greater flexibility of responses but ensure the same level of entitlements and support as looked after children.

- The Secretary of State for Education must update the sufficiency guidance to state that the commissioning of accommodation for vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds should be underpinned by data on young people who present as homeless, those on the edge of care, vulnerable groups of young people approaching the age of 16 and vulnerable groups already 16 or 17 years old. The guidance should also make it clear that the same level of rigour in planning accommodation is required for all types of provision – including ‘other arrangements’ categorised as ‘priority need’ for homelessness services.

Local government

- Local authorities should review their commissioning strategies to stipulate that providers must have policies on safeguarding, sexual exploitation, running away and going missing, evictions and unplanned moves, drug and alcohol abuse and violence prevention in order to bid for contracts. These policies should be reviewed by a senior social worker in the local authorities’ safeguarding teams.

- Local authorities should commission accommodation that can provide quality support to help young people access mental health services in order to reduce the risks poor mental health can pose to a young person sustaining their tenancy.
Ofsted

- Ofsted should work with the Department for Education on the introduction of a new regulatory framework. This work should include a thematic inspection of current provision in advance of the introduction of any new regulatory framework.

LSCBs

- LSCBs should examine safeguarding in accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds. They should appoint a named LSCB contact for all local providers. LSCBs should consider undertaking consultation with young people to establish their views on this type of provision.

Central government

- The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions should, when making the forthcoming changes to housing benefit eligibility for 18 to 21 year olds include an exemption for all young people who lived in supportive accommodation aged 16 or 17 regardless of status.

- The Department of Health should examine ways of ensuring that the vulnerable young people living in this kind of accommodation have good access to health services, including mental health services.

The government should amend the Psychoactive Substances Bill currently in passage in Parliament to make it an aggravating factor to sell any controlled drugs, including psychoactive substances in the vicinity of residential children’s homes and supportive accommodation for young people.

Following an unplanned move:

‘I was traumatised afterwards, I still haven’t got over it now.’

Care leaver
Methodology

This report is based on three sources of evidence:

- **Local authorities’ statutory strategies for the provision of sufficient accommodation for looked after children.**
  
  All 152 local authorities who are under the duty to produce sufficiency strategies were approached for their most up to date strategies. 102 strategies out of 152 were gathered as a result of this exercise. In most cases the strategies were either available online or shared on request. In 50 cases we were unable to obtain the strategy. The reasons given were either that the strategy was currently being updated and would not be available in time for us to analyse it for this report or that the local authority failed to acknowledge or respond to our request.

- **A survey of providers of accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds.**
  
  We designed and administered an online survey of providers who can accommodate 16 and 17 year olds. Appendix A contains the full survey. Our survey sought to establish what provision typically looks like, some of the risks faced by 16 and 17 year olds in these settings, and typical safeguarding procedures. We received responses from representatives of 119 organisations who elected to respond to this survey and who, in 2014, accommodated approximately 2,113 16 and 17 year olds across 83 local authorities in England. Although the survey participants represented a range of types of accommodation on offer, we recognise that the survey may not be representative of the whole sector and that because providers volunteered to take part there may be a selection bias.

- **Focus groups with young people who have experienced this kind of accommodation.**
  
  The Children’s Society works with looked after children, care leavers, homeless young people and other groups who may have experienced this accommodation. We identified a number of young people we have worked with who have had this experience and asked them for their views. Their thoughts and feelings about this accommodation are found throughout the report along with case studies previously featured in Getting the house in order.
Introduction

This report focuses on the lives of approximately 8,400 16 and 17 year olds in England. These young people can no longer live at home with their families and instead live in accommodation provided by their local authority. 3,200 are looked after children placed in 'other arrangements', 3,400 are care leavers and 1,800 are homeless 16 and 17 year olds being accommodated by their local housing services.

0.1 Why are 16 and 17 year olds accommodated by local authorities vulnerable?

The law recognises that any person under the age of 18 is a child due to their developmental needs, lack of experience of the adult world and their need for guidance when they make their first steps into independent living. 16 and 17 year olds who are provided with accommodation by their local authority are not just vulnerable because they are children. They are also vulnerable because of both their likely earlier experiences of abuse and neglect and the current risks they face.

For example, around 60% of children who are or have been in the care of a local authority have experienced abuse or neglect prior to entering care and while in care many experience numerous placement breakdowns. In 2014, 24% of 16 and 17 year olds ceasing care had experienced five or more placements throughout their time in care. This was compared to just 10% for 10 to 15 year olds.

Young people who seek help from local authorities because of homelessness are also likely to come from families known to children's services; families struggling with substance misuse or conflict. For homeless young people there are a number of extremely common reasons for leaving the family home. In the case study analysis for Getting the house in order 59% of the young people whose stories we examined left home because their relationship with their parent or carer had broken down. 12% had to leave because their parents disapproved of their choice of girlfriend or boyfriend.

We know that an increasing number of families with 16 or 17 year old children are struggling to cope. Between 2010 and 2014 the number of 16 and 17 year olds categorised as 'children in need' increased by 8% from 66,200 to 70,680. 16 and 17 year olds are now more likely to be considered 'in need' due to abuse and neglect compared to any other age group.

These young people are also likely to experience problems of their own. Our case study review of homeless young people found that they are likely to be dealing with up to two major personal issues like a mental health problem or a risk of sexual exploitation. Research shows that looked after children and care leavers also have a high level of need. One study estimated that up to 63% of looked after children have a mental health problem and in 2008 49% of young men under the age of 21 who had come into contact with the criminal justice system had a care experience. Care leavers are also vulnerable. They are between four and five times more likely to self-harm in adulthood according to Department of Health data and 41% are not in education, employment or training.

There are of course other reasons 16 and 17 year olds might seek help with accommodation. They could be exiting a secure unit in the youth justice system and need somewhere to live. They may have had a child of their own and need access to mother and baby accommodation in order to ensure that they can properly care for their child. Others need accommodation in order to escape gang violence or criminal or sexual exploitation.

It is clear that whatever the reasons, these young people are vulnerable and will require accommodation in a safe and supportive place, with staff who are able to deal with their needs, safeguard them and help them overcome their previous experiences. Wherever they are placed they are going to need a lot of care and support to enable them to stay safe and move successfully into adulthood.
On your own now
The risks of unsuitable accommodation for older teenagers

0.2 Why does there need to be a focus on this kind of accommodation?

16 and 17 year olds who are looked after by a local authority can be placed in regulated children’s accommodation with foster carers or in children’s homes. In recent years there has been a focus on making this kind of accommodation, particularly children’s homes, safer and of a higher quality. The result has been new stricter regulations, guidance and inspection frameworks being put in place to ensure that standards are raised. The same attention has not been given to ‘other settings’. ‘Other settings’ include a number of arrangements a local authority can make to meet the housing and support needs of a child. ‘Other arrangements’ can include living at home with the family, in a youth justice setting or in what we are terming, for this report, unregulated children’s accommodation.

This kind of accommodation includes foyers, supported accommodation units, supported lodgings, floating tenancy support, crashpads, nightstops and training flats. You can learn about what these kinds of accommodation typically look like in appendix A.

We know that approximately 22% of looked after children aged 16 or 17 are accommodated in ‘other arrangements’ much of which is unregulated for children. Other children, not looked after, live in this accommodation too. For example Getting the house in order found that 1,800 homeless, but not looked after 16 and 17 year olds are placed in these settings.

Our estimate of a total population of 8,400 16 and 17 year olds is a significant number of vulnerable young people, and it is almost certain to be an underestimate. These young people can be as vulnerable as those who are fostered or placed in children’s homes, but they are living in settings that are not regulated or monitored in the same way. Such accommodation can be located in unsafe areas, and the amount of support these providers are commissioned to provide varies across the country. Very little data is collected on how many young people aged 16 and 17 they support, the support they offer, their safeguarding practices and the outcomes for these vulnerable young people. Few expectations are set in relation to what the good practice should be like for the children in their care.

Examples from our practice demonstrate the lack of oversight over the standard of support for 16 and 17 year olds accommodated by local authorities can make such accommodation unsafe for the young people placed there. The matter is further complicated by the fact that the majority of the accommodation where 16 and 17 year olds are placed also houses young adults aged 18+

The House of Commons Education Select Committee’s report Into independence, not out of care concluded that it is ‘unacceptable for these young people, still legally defined as ‘children’ and in the care of their local authority, to be housed in unregulated settings’ and recommended that the Department for Education consults ‘on a framework of individual regulatory oversight’ to raise standards.

‘There are no rules... some people have got arrested.’

Care leaver
to 25. For example, 64% of the respondents to our survey of these accommodation providers stated that they provided accommodation for 16 to 25 year olds. This exposes 16 and 17 year olds to further risks and creates an expectation that this age group should be as able to cope with living on their own as young adults aged 18+.

There have already been calls for change. The House of Commons Education Select Committee’s report Into independence, not out of care concluded that it is ‘unacceptable for these young people, still legally defined as ‘children’ and in the care of their local authority, to be housed in unregulated settings’ and recommended that the Department for Education consults ‘on a framework of individual regulatory oversight’ to raise standards.19
### 0.3 What does the law say about how to accommodate 16 and 17 year olds?

There are a number of pieces of statutory guidance which outline the responsibilities of local authorities towards 16 and 17 year olds in need of accommodation. The table below summarises them:

#### Table 1: Guidance on accommodating and safeguarding older teenagers

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<tr>
<th>Guidance</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Relevant provisions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working together to safeguard children&lt;sup&gt;20&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>To ensure that all agencies work together to safeguard children and protect them from harm.</td>
<td>• All children under the age of 18 must be safeguarded to the same standards regardless of age.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitation: supplementary guidance&lt;sup&gt;21&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>To direct local authorities to take a number of steps to respond to, prevent, and plan services for children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation.</td>
<td>• Outlines children vulnerable to sexual exploitation including: children and young people who have a history of running away or of going missing from home, those with special needs, those in and leaving residential and foster care, migrant children, unaccompanied asylum seeking children, children who have disengaged from education and children who are abusing drugs and alcohol, and those involved in gangs.&lt;sup&gt;22&lt;/sup&gt; • The responsibility to tackle sexual exploitation for all children and young people under the age of 18.&lt;sup&gt;23&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of accommodation for 16 and 17 year old young people who may be homeless and/or require accommodation&lt;sup&gt;24&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>To outline how responsibilities for homeless 16 and 17 year olds should be shared between housing and children’s services and to detail how they should be accommodated.</td>
<td>• Children’s services are the lead agency for helping 16 and 17 year olds who are homeless.&lt;sup&gt;25&lt;/sup&gt; • Homeless 16 and 17 year olds should become looked after children.&lt;sup&gt;26&lt;/sup&gt; • Children aged 16 and 17 can refuse to become looked after but the local authority must consider all their other needs before accepting this refusal.&lt;sup&gt;27&lt;/sup&gt; • Local authorities cannot use section 17 (children in need status) as a substitute for section 20 (looked after status) when looking to accommodate homeless 16 and 17 year olds.&lt;sup&gt;28&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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| Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from care | To help find and protect children who run away and offer them specific services to keep them safe from harm | - Homeless 16 and 17 year olds can be placed in unregulated accommodation but when they are the local authority must still prepare a placement plan that is agreed between them, the young person and the accommodation provider.  
- When a young person is accommodated by housing services, children’s services should extend them support under section 17 (children in need status).  
- Services will do everything they can to prevent intentional homelessness. |
| Issued under Local Authority Social Services Act 1970                   |                                                                         |                                                                                     |
| Sufficiency: Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children | To ensure that local authorities are able to provide safe and suitable accommodation for all looked after children aged 0 to 18. | - Produce an annual document outlining how the local authority will accommodate all looked after children.  
- The document must analyse the level of need and the marketplace for accommodation and make recommendations about how to ensure sufficient accommodation.  
- There must be a range of provision for care leavers and those who become looked after at the age of 16 or 17.  
- Commission accommodation in such a way that supports the continuity of provision beyond the age of 18. |
| Issued under Children Act 2004                                      |                                                                         |                                                                                     |
| The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations, Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers  | To outline the duties and responsibilities local authorities have towards care leavers once they have left care and whilst they are young adults | - Housing and children’s services to produce a joint strategy to meet the needs of care leavers.  
- Homelessness legislation should not be used to meet the needs of care leavers.  
- Must be a strategy to prevent care leavers’ tenancies from breaking down.  
- Best practice is for accommodation to meet other quality standards like the former Supporting People Quality Assurance Framework or the Foyer Federation Accreditation Scheme. |
| Issued under Children Act 1989                                       |                                                                         |                                                                                     |
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### The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations, Volume 2: care planning, placement and case review

Issued under Children Act 1989

- To detail the types of placement available to looked after children, the standards they should meet and to outline how to plan and review the support offered to looked after children
- Other arrangements are not regulated under the Care Standards Act 2000 and will not be inspected by Ofsted.
- Accommodation should be safe, properly furnished, warm, and in a good state of repair.
- Providers of ‘other arrangements’ should be scrutinised by the local authority and there should be oversight and quality assurance.

### Homes and Communities Agency

Regulator for housing associations and many supported accommodation providers

- Risk-based regulatory regime.
- Ensures standards around tenancy agreements and rent payments.
- Provisions to guarantee tenants’ role in decision making.

### Foyer Federation

Membership organisation for Foyers which administers an independent accreditation scheme

- Three strand accreditation framework.
- Focus on young people.
- An approach designed to develop independent living and employability skills.
- Based on a relationship with rights and responsibilities placed on both the young person and the provider.

### Ofsted

Can inspect accommodation under the single inspection framework for local authority children’s services

- Single inspection framework examines provision holistically.
- Inspectors can choose to put accommodation under increased scrutiny.
- Inspectors can examine provision for homeless 16 and 17 year olds and scrutinise those accommodated outside section 20.

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All the pieces of guidance recognise that, regardless of where a young person lives, or the legal provision under which they are placed in accommodation, they may be vulnerable and will need appropriate support. Critically safeguarding responsibilities apply to all children under 18. 16 and 17 year olds must be as carefully protected as younger children. The guidance also tells us that accommodation should be safe and secure and in a good state of repair. There is clear instruction that providers should be scrutinised thoroughly to ascertain if they are capable and suitable to provide accommodation to young people and also that all young people, again regardless of the provisions under which they are placed in accommodation, should have a care plan.

What is also clear is that this provision is unregulated and uninspected against its suitability for children, that formal accreditation and standards are optional, not mandatory; that throughout the pieces of guidance national government recognises that the risks of placement breakdown are very high; and that local authorities must work hard to prevent this from happening and to help those young people who do experience such a breakdown.

Thinking about 16 and 17 year olds in such a context is sobering. It is clear even from the guidance that their situation is precarious and that things can easily go wrong. Of course, young people do not live in isolation. There are other people, other risks, and other opportunities that will present themselves to them. In the next chapter we will examine more closely these risks to understand more fully just how dangerous this provision can be for young people.
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Chapter one: Young people, accommodation and risk
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1.1 Why are we focussing on risk?

Living away from home, in new accommodation, with new people and new rules is a big change for any 16 or 17 year old. There are likely to be many more risks than are found in a family environment. From case studies, practitioners and young people themselves we learnt during our research for Getting the house in order that some of these risks could be very serious.

For example, once accommodated, young people often have to make new friends. These friendships can carry risk as the following case study demonstrates:

A group of five 16 and 17 year old girls had been placed in a hostel and began to make friends with a group of ten older men aged 24 and 25 who were also staying there. The men often bought them alcohol and drugs and over time began to sexually exploit them but the girls did not recognise their exploitation as they thought the men were their friends.

As one young person told us that:
‘it takes time to actually make a true friend’
as you have to be more mature.

In the focus groups one young person told us that one of the things she liked least about her hostel was the fact that:
‘the whole place stinks of weed’
suggesting how, with young adults in residence, it is likely that some accommodation units provide 16 and 17 year olds with easy access to alcohol, legal highs and illegal drugs.

Other risks were apparent too. Whilst the young people we spoke too often said they enjoyed having their own space one participant with significant mental health problems told us how lonely and unsafe they often felt:
‘No one visited me for days. There are always doors banging. I have no idea who is staying there’

Indeed another participant also focused on the theme of safety telling us that another girl:
‘had been letting her boyfriend in for weeks. No-one had a clue. She put herself at risk and she put me at risk. I was scared when I knew people could get in without them [the staff] knowing’

This evidence, from practice and consultation gives a flavour of the risks that young people sometimes face in this accommodation. These risks, coupled with the increased freedom of living outside the family unit make a dangerous context for vulnerable young people.

We wanted to establish just how risky this accommodation could be in our survey of accommodation providers which we ran in June and July of 2015. The survey received over 150 responses from organisations in 83 local authorities across England. Once we closed the survey we reviewed the responses and removed ones that were incomplete or from accommodation providers that did not provide accommodation to 16 and 17 year olds. This left us with 119 responses. 62% of the providers were from registered charities and 32% were registered housing associations. Although the sample exemplifies a range of providers it is unlikely to be entirely representative of the sector.
1.2 What did we find?

We asked respondents to give us their subjective view about how serious they felt a set of risks were to the 16 and 17 year olds in their accommodation.

Substance misuse and poor mental health were found to be the two sets of risks that most concerned providers. These risks clustered closely together within 10 points of each other.

The underlying data showed providers judge legal highs to be the most common ‘high risk’ they experience. Legal highs are psycho-active substances, bought legally over the counter throughout England and were judged to be high risk by 63% of providers.

The severity of the risk of legal highs contributed to a general, severe risk of substance misuse overall. Providers clearly worry about the young people in their care misusing substances as alcohol, illegal drugs and legal highs all scored over 80% when high and medium risk were combined.

This mirrors what our practitioners are finding when they work with vulnerable older teenagers. Increasingly they find legal highs to be a risk factor for young people both in terms of substance abuse and in terms of exploitation. Often older people looking to exploit them will use legal highs as a way of beginning to groom an older child for exploitation as the following case study demonstrates.

A group of boys living in a local foyer were targeted by men who gave them legal highs. The boys thought the legal highs were free but the men later informed them they were in debt and needed to pay back the money they owed. The boys did not have enough money to pay the men and so the men coerced them into on-street begging in order to pay their debts.

Poor mental health was the next biggest risk after substance and alcohol misuse. Poor mental health was not reported to be as high a risk as others by many providers but across the board providers scored it to a consistent concern suggesting that it is a risk that is extremely likely to occur for 16 and 17 year olds in this accommodation but that its impact can vary.

Involvement in gangs appears to be the least severe risk to those in this accommodation out of those measured by the survey, suggesting that gang affiliation is uncommon or not known about. Bullying and crime also score relatively lower than the main risks. It is interesting to consider why this might be. Bullying for example is probably likely to happen but it is perceived to have little impact, whereas crime is perhaps less likely but has a higher impact. It is important to consider why a risk might score highly as it can inform safeguarding responses.
In focus groups however young people told us that bullying was still a concern because unlike in school bullies in supportive accommodation:

‘can actually hurt you’

Sexual exploitation occupies a place in the middle of ranking of the different risks. We know from our practice that sexual exploitation is experienced by 16 and 17 year olds and that, if poorly managed it is a risk that can spread to effect many young people in the accommodation:

We also asked respondents to identify where these risks commonly emerged from.

Graph B shows how often different groups of people put 16 and 17 year olds living independently in this accommodation at risk. Risks introduced by friends were perceived to be the most common whilst risks posed by strangers are the least common.

The risks posed by those inside the accommodation are generally reported to be less serious than risks from other sources (except online strangers). This finding could be questioned however as the high scores for family and friends suggest that risks are more likely to emerge from people that the young person knows. There may be a slight reporting bias on the part of the accommodation providers who are unlikely to want to portray the people in their accommodation as a source of risk.

The finding that risk emerging from those known to young people is more common than other sources of risk is important. From a safeguarding perspective it suggests that providers need to pay close attention to who the 16 and 17 year olds in their care associate with and that young people need comprehensive relationship education.
1.2.2 At risk of violence?

We also asked providers to consider the level of violence within their accommodation. In total 101 respondents estimated that in 2014 there were 1,238 violent incidents in their accommodation. This of course varied between providers – many had no violent incidents but others had lots. One respondent reported an estimate of 500. On average this suggests that most providers experienced approximately 13 violent incidents every year.

The comments accompanying this question were very interesting. Some providers indicated that these were only the violent incidents the staff ‘are aware of’ suggesting there were likely to be violent incidents among residents they did not know about. Other respondents remarked that whilst there were no incidents on the premises they had had young people staying with them involved in violence just “outside the accommodation” or “offsite”. This is anecdotal evidence, but it suggests that 16 and 17 year olds living in this accommodation are likely to be exposed to violence and that it can happen both on and off the premises.

We analysed whether or not providers that accommodated specific age-groups were more likely to experience violence than others. Providers accommodating 16 to 21 year olds had the highest average for violent incidents compared to the other those housing only 16 and 17 year olds, 16 to 25 year olds and individuals of any age, although this finding was not statistically significant (p=0.72).

We also looked to see whether or not charity or housing providers experienced more violence. Housing providers have a higher rate of violent events than charities in our sample and whilst this was not statistically significant there is only an 11% chance that the finding is not representative of the wider population.

The answers to our question also suggested that it is quite common for accommodation providers to involve the police when violence occurs:

‘99% of the time I will always encourage my team to call the police’

This is an issue of concern. Whilst understandable from the perspective of the staff, calling the police could be extremely detrimental for the young people involved. Having the police attend an incident means it is more likely to be criminalised and have serious consequences for those involved. This is not to condone violence; obviously there will be situations where the police must be involved. In a family setting however, parents and foster carers would perhaps be less likely to involve the police and thus shield those in their care from criminalisation. Vulnerable young people aged 16 and 17 living in this accommodation appear unlikely to be offered such a second chance and may have to live with the consequences of their actions years before their contemporaries living at home or in regulated settings might have to.

Indeed the involvement of the police in these settings appears to be extensive. We asked respondents to tell us how frequently they interacted with a range of other professionals. 44% of respondents said they had contact on a regular basis with the police. This was the second highest score for professionals to receive regular contact from accommodation providers after the local Job Centre Plus with whom 49% of providers had regular contact.
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1.2.3 Financially at risk?

The graph below shows that 82% of providers reported that three quarters or more of their 16 and 17 year olds were in receipt of state benefits. 54% of accommodation providers were regularly in contact with Job Centre Plus staff for the 16 and 17 year olds in their care. If the young people are placed in this accommodation under the Children Act however there should be no need for any contact with the job centre as children’s services are supposed to support the young person financially until they reach 18.

The other questions confirm the financial strain faced by 16 and 17 year olds. Only 11% of providers have 16 and 17 year olds who are in no debt whilst living with them. 80% of providers report some level of debt, with 30% of providers stating that three quarters or more of their 16 and 17 year olds are in debt. Worse still, 22% of providers state that three quarters or more of their 16 and 17 year olds are in rent arrears to them.

The issue of rent arrears is complex. Standard practice is to have housing benefit paid directly to the accommodation provider to ensure that rent is paid in full every month thus preventing arrears. Providers often have to make an additional charge however to cover other bills like energy and water bills, television licences, provision of meals and other costs. It is likely that it is these payments that are building up to become ‘rent arrears’.

Starting adult life with debt and rent arrears is not ideal. It is of greater concern when placed in the context of how much money 16 and 17 year olds are likely to have. The rules for 16 and 17 year olds claiming benefits are complicated and far from standardised and are likely to become more complex under Universal Credit. In Appendix D we have summarised the payments 16 and 17 year olds are eligible for.

It is also of note that, with no recourse to loans, 16 and 17 year olds are forced to rely on informal sources of money to pay debts exposing them to unacceptably high levels of risk as we saw in the case study where boys were coerced into on-street begging in order to pay debts accumulated through the use of legal highs.

Graph C – Financial health of 16 and 17 year olds in accommodation
Accommodation providers are commissioned by the local authority because of their ability to move young people into a positive and independent adulthood but the financial situation of 16 and 17 year olds is clearly making this extremely challenging for them.

82% of providers stated that more than three quarters of their 16 and 17 year olds were living in poverty. The official definition of poverty in England, a widely used international measure, is 60% of median income. Currently this is £139 a week for a single person without children. £139 a week, after housing costs, may sound like a lot for a 16 or 17 year old but for the majority they are in a state of semi-dependence upon their parents.

Evidence from our homelessness report Getting the house in order suggests young people aged 16 and 17 are not even close to having £139 a week. Using a small sample of seven young people who were in work and homeless we were able to work out that they earned an average of £121 a week. Using a small sample of five people we were able to work out an average rent of £57 week. These are not robust figures but they paint a picture of the financial crisis facing young people living alone. Based on these figures there would only be £9.14 a day to pay bills, buy food and clothing, pay transport and educational costs and to use for emergency expenditure.47

These findings, around the financial exclusion of these vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds is of great concern. Children’s services should be providing them with enough money to live and they shouldn’t have to be relying on benefits to make ends meet.

A 16 year old girl was living in supported accommodation where she was supposed to be receiving support to manage her finances and budget. By the end of her tenancy she had built up rent arrears of almost £4,000.

We asked providers to estimate how many 16 and 17 year olds they evicted in 2014. They responded that they had evicted 189 young people in 2014. We identified providers who could tell us both how many 16 and 17 year olds they had accommodated and how many they had evicted and arrived at a sample of 85 of our providers. On average 12% of the 16 and 17 year olds in this kind of accommodation were evicted.

Many providers classified evictions as ‘unplanned moves’. Some unplanned moves were due to common problems that might result in evictions in other kinds of accommodation but others were due to the high support needs of the young person. In these cases the providers had found, after the young person had moved in, that their needs were so high and complex that they could not meet them. There was some positive practice. One provider stated that they had to always ‘undertake planned moves’ and were not able to evict young people.

We tested to see whether evictions were more likely in accommodation run by housing associations than charities and although the rate of eviction is slightly higher in housing associations within the sample this finding is not statistically significant (p=0.53).
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Providers also told us about the reasons they might have to consider eviction, or an unplanned move, for a young person.

Graph D suggests that the causes of eviction are widespread. Illegal drug use, violence and damage to the accommodation are the most commonly cited reasons. The least common were consuming alcohol and the use of legal highs. Considering how serious a risk providers felt legal highs and alcohol use to be it is noteworthy that these particular risks seem unlikely to result in evictions or unplanned moves. If they are unwilling to evict because of legal highs and alcohol, yet they are seriously concerned about the risks these substances pose to 16 and 17 year olds.

37% of providers had evicted a 16 or 17 year old because they had not spent enough nights in the accommodation. It is common in licence agreements for this kind of accommodation for the provider to stipulate that the young person must spend a certain number of nights in the accommodation to maintain their tenancy. What is most alarming here is that for a 16 or 17 year old to spend an unplanned night away from their foster placement or a residential children’s home would see them reported missing and receive a return interview in an attempt to prevent it happening again. If young people are spending enough nights away to get evicted it is highly likely they are not being reported as missing to the police at all. If they are it would appear that local authorities’ interventions to prevent running away are clearly not working in these settings.

Such a finding was supported in the focus groups where one young person told us that:

‘at half 11 the doors get locked and then they are not open till half 7’

Such curfew practices are highly dangerous and are forcing young people to spend the night on the streets. The safeguarding implications of this are very serious.

Finally it is worth noting that only 8% of providers, when asked explicitly, stated that they would never evict a 16 or 17 year old.

Accommodation providers told us that they all explained the eviction process to 16 and 17 year olds in a clear and simple manner and that they reported all evictions to children’s services. Reporting an eviction to children’s services is vital if they are to receive further support. It is our hope that reporting this will enable children’s services to step in and offer more support. We know from practice however that sometimes children’s services use a young person’s previous refusal of their support as grounds not to re-assess them and re-offer them support. If this occurs and they are found to be intentionally homeless by housing services then they will be left with nowhere to turn.
When a young person is evicted or subject to an unplanned move we wanted to find out where they go. Graph E displays the different number of providers who had seen young people be moved to a number of different kinds of provision. It is clear that most evictions result in the young person being passed to another provider of supported accommodation. In consultation young people agreed that it was common for a young person to go through a number of providers before they settled down and sustained a full tenancy. 41% of providers however have seen a young person placed in a bed and breakfast that is closed to the general public as it has been block booked by the local authority to provide emergency temporary accommodation.

This is hugely worrying. Bed and Breakfasts are deemed unsuitable for children to stay in for more than two nights in an emergency and should never be used by local authorities. This finding also supports something we have found in practice. Anecdotal evidence from practitioners suggests that local authorities, once they have block booked a bed and breakfast, are not always classifying it as a bed and breakfast because they have complete control over who stays there. As such these stays in bed and breakfasts may go unreported at the national level.

The government has deemed bed and breakfasts to be unsuitable because local authorities often place very vulnerable people they find difficult to house elsewhere in this setting. These people can be street homeless, have just left prison, or have drug and alcohol problems. It was also felt that bed and breakfast offered young people no facilities to prepare themselves for independent living.

A homeless 16 year old was offered accommodation under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 but refused. He was placed in a foyer by housing services where he began taking drugs. His drug use escalated and he was evicted. Housing services gave him a room in a bed and breakfast but he was soon evicted and re-presented as homeless. At this point housing services considered him intentionally homeless. They referred him to children’s services but because he had previously refused to become looked after they said his case was closed to them. He remained homeless and slept rough in the park.
The responses from accommodation providers confirms that 16 and 17 year olds living in this accommodation, unregulated for children, face high levels of risk.

These risks, more often than not come from people they know. There are pervasive risks, like alcohol, legal highs and drugs but there are also other risks that might be harder to spot like bullying and poor mental health. We also know that frequent contact with the police and Youth Offending Teams suggest that these risks may result in criminalisation.

It is the responsibility of children’s services to protect children from these risks and to intervene early to stop them becoming more serious. Children’s services must pay as much attention to older teenagers as they do to young children so far as safeguarding is concerned. It is also the responsibility of all organisations involved in a child’s life to safeguard the young people they come into contact with through observing, recording and reporting any risks about which they may have concerns.

With 16 and 17 year olds there is also another urgent reason why services must intervene as once a child turns 18 they are no-longer entitled to help on a statutory basis and the help that is on offer is often in short supply. Furthermore the cost these young people could pose, as adults, to the public purse could be very high unless they receive all the help and support they are entitled to as children.

There is a particular risk that all the threats to these young people’s safety are exacerbated by their mental health needs. These are clearly identified as a key problem in this survey. It is an issue of particular concern as we know that 16 and 17 year olds often struggle to access mental health services. The House of Commons Health Select Committee’s report on Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services found there to be a lack of clarity on whether adult or children’s mental health services were responsible for 16 and 17 year olds across the country. It also identified high treatment thresholds and poor transitions between children and adult services being common for 16 and 17 year olds. Yet, it is at the age of 16 that, for looked after children, measurement of mental health and resilience ceases as the ‘strengths and difficulties’ questionnaire is no-longer used. This prevents services from identifying problems early and knowing when things start to deteriorate. For those not looked after, their wellbeing is unlikely to have even been measured.

Financial risk is not one usually considered a risk by professionals working with 16 and 17 year olds but it is worth restating just how little money some 16 and 17 year olds in this accommodation might have. The minimum wage for those under 18 years of age is £3.79 an hour and the National Office of Statistics has found this age group to be one of the most likely demographics to be on zero-hours contracts. On such low income, young people would be required to work 15 hours in order to earn the amount they could be entitled to on Job Seeker’s Allowance (JSA), £57.35 a week.

Fitting in 15 hours of low paid work between college or training whilst also coping with an unsettled home life is difficult and most young people are more likely to opt for JSA payments or income support. Of course, JSA comes with conditions attached and the risk of being sanctioned for young people, and therefore losing all financial support is high; 8.4% of young people under 25 years of age on JSA are sanctioned every month – higher than any other age group. Indeed one respondent to our survey said that going out to work, instead of claiming benefits, whilst living in supported accommodation was “financial suicide” due to how much rents increased if the young person was in work. For 16 and 17 year olds, work not only does not pay but can also create serious safeguarding risks.

Another worrying finding is about young people in supported accommodation facing evictions and intentional homelessness.
If 12% of 16 and 17 year olds are being evicted or subject to an unplanned move nationally then based on our estimate of the population children living in this accommodation the number losing their accommodation could be up to 1,100. These young people are at risk of being abandoned by services who should be protecting them from harm.

There are a series of issues that need to be addressed:

**Joint guidance on ‘Provision of accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds who may be homeless and/or require accommodation’**

- The Secretaries of State for Education & Communities and Local Government should review and update the 2010 guidance, now five years old, on accommodating homeless 16 and 17 year olds. This update should ensure that the use of Bed and Breakfasts including those block-booked by the local authority is prohibited.

- The update to the guidance on homeless 16 and 17 year olds should state that when a young person is subject to an eviction or an ‘unplanned move’ whilst living under the provisions of the Housing Act 1996, children’s services must re-assess them under the Children Act 1989 to see whether their needs would be better met under section 20.

**The Department for Education**

- The Secretary of State for Education should create a new status of a ‘vulnerable 16 of 17 year old’ which would allow greater flexibility of responses but ensure the same level of entitlements and support as looked after children.

- The government must update the statutory guidance to the Children Act 1989 to extend the measurement of looked after children’s emotional and behavioural problems (currently performed using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire) beyond the age of 15 to include 16 and 17 year olds. This measurement should be augmented for all looked after children and young people to include measures of subjective wellbeing and mental health.

**Department of Communities and Local Government**

- The Housing Act 1996 should be amended to prevent 16 and 17 year olds from ever being classified as ‘intentionally homeless’.

- The Department of Communities and Local Government should collect data from local authorities to establish how many former Bed & Breakfasts have been reclassified as accommodation providers and the number of vulnerable young people who have been placed in this kind of accommodation.
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Ministry of Justice

- The government should amend the Psychoactive Substances Bill currently in passage in Parliament to make it an aggravating factor to sell any controlled drugs, including psychoactive substances in the vicinity of residential children’s homes and supportive accommodation for young people.

Department of Work and Pensions

- The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions should issue guidance that any 16 or 17 year old who applies for housing support, either within universal credit or through existing channels, should be immediately referred to make a homelessness application so that they can be assessed by children’s services and receive additional help and support to ensure they can maintain their tenancy.
- The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions should review how direct payments are made on behalf of vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds to reduce the chances of young people getting into rent arrears or debt due to other charges made by accommodation providers that fall outside the scope of Housing Benefit.

Local government

- Local authorities should commission accommodation that can provide quality support to help young people access mental health services in order to reduce the risks poor mental health can pose to a young person sustaining their tenancy.
- Local Authorities should, as part of their Joint Strategic Needs Assessments focus on the health needs of all young adults requiring accommodation in supported or homeless accommodation and plan effective responses to their complex health needs, including their mental health.

LSCBs

- The risks faced by this group of young people need to be mapped and assessed by the LSCB.

Clinical Commissioning Groups and CAMHS Services

- Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) should always be commissioned to provide services for 16 and 17 year olds and providers of CAMHS should put in place fast track access schemes for young people living in supportive accommodation as there may only be a short window of opportunity to engage a young person in treatment.
Chapter two: Safeguarding and support in accommodation
2.1 Why did we survey accommodation providers?

Given the levels of risk it is critical that providers themselves are able to properly safeguard the young people in their care in order to shield them from risk and keep them safe. Good safeguarding requires different organisations to work closely together in a coordinated manner where they share information and respond quickly. The need to actively safeguard in an emergency however is reduced if young people are provided with consistent and quality support that meets their needs. In this chapter we explore what provision is like, the support received and the safeguarding practices in place through the responses given by providers to our survey.

The government guidance is quite clear that no matter where a child is living, all accommodation is “suitable for their needs and linked to their wider plans and aspirations.” And it is the responsibility of the local authority to always ensure that, no matter who is providing the accommodation, a child’s needs are met holistically through careful planning and assigning responsibility for specific needs to different organisations. Depending on whether the 16 or 17 year old is accommodated as a looked after child or under other provisions the guidance is more or less prescriptive in relation to what the entitlements for support are for that child. Appendix B explains the differences in support for looked after and non-looked after children whilst they are 16 and 17 years-old and during early adulthood.

The entitlements outlined in Appendix B will result in different arrangements in practice for young people aged 16 and 17 placed in this accommodation. For example, those not supported as looked after children may need to sign tenancy agreement, claim their own benefits and can be evicted if they break the conditions of their tenancy. In the next section we use the results of the survey to establish what this accommodation is like for a 16 or 17 year old. What needs do providers meet and are local authorities providing them with holistic care?

‘There are no rules, you are allowed to do whatever you like.’

Care leaver
2.2 What did we find?

The survey results give us some basic information to help build a clearer picture of the accommodation we are talking about. Here are some key facts:

- 64% of the providers offer accommodation to young people between the ages of 16 and 25. 19% offered accommodation to young people between the ages of 16 and 21. 8% provide accommodation exclusively for 16 and 17 year olds, whilst 9% provide accommodation where 16 and 17 year olds can find themselves living with people of any age.

- These providers are capable of providing accommodation for 3,517 people, at any one time; an average of 30 people living with each provider.

- In 2014, the providers estimated that they accommodated 2,113 16 and 17 year olds at some point during the year.

- Many providers offered more than one type of accommodation.

- 83% of the providers stated that they provided ‘moving on’ accommodation that is time limited and aimed at preparing young people for independence.

- 22% offered floating support where they support a young person to maintain a tenancy independently. One third offered long-term accommodation which was not time limited and 21% could provide accommodation in an emergency at short notice.

The style of provision varied:

- Supported accommodation was by far the most popular style of accommodation selected

- Foyers, the only externally accredited style of accommodation, were offered by 21% of providers.

- Funding arrangements varied. 42% of providers relied on a single funding source for all their activity. The most common funding arrangement was via a single block grant jointly commissioned by the local authority. 20% of providers received no money from children’s services at all.

These findings tell us some important things. The majority of 16 and 17 year olds are living in accommodation with people up to nine years older than them and with a tenancy that is time limited and specially designed to prepare them for independence. Whilst they are likely to be in supported accommodation it is unlikely to be supported accommodation that is accredited. Less than a quarter of organisations will be able to offer them floating support when they move into independent living.
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which makes it likely they will have to build a new relationship with another professional in the near future.

We asked providers to tell us what different funding streams they used to commission their provision for 16 and 17 year olds. Graph G summarises what they told us.

The funding picture is complicated. Unless in exceptional circumstances 16 and 17 year olds should be looked after children under the care of children’s services and yet only 10% of funding comes from this source. 48% of funding comes in the form of a block grant from the council and whilst this could include money from children’s services the majority of the answers suggested it was from a mix of adult services, ‘supporting people’ money, or housing services. Funding arrangements are not transparent and it is difficult to establish whether children’s services are playing enough of a role.

Graph G – Sources of funding for 16 and 17 year olds

Graph H – Analysis of whether support required meets young people’s needs, as judged by the provider
2.2.1 What kind of service are 16 and 17 year olds receiving?

Whilst 80% of providers are receiving referrals from both children’s and housing services, 65% of providers stated that half, or less, of the 16 and 17 year olds they accommodated have a social worker. Social workers are responsible for the welfare of the young people in their charge and play a key role in planning their future and making sure all their needs are met. If a child was being accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act, in line with the guidance, they would have to have a social worker.

We asked providers to think about the levels of support the 16 and 17 year olds they accommodate require. We asked them to give a subjective judgement about how much support they felt different kinds of 16 and 17 year olds required and then asked them to plot this against the support the local authority commissions them to provide.

Graph H highlights some interesting trends. There may be a slight reporting bias but two thirds of providers feel that they are commissioned appropriately to meet the support needs of the 16 and 17 year olds in their care. When the young person’s support needs are very high, 36% of providers felt that they were commissioned to offer the individual more support than they needed. Conversely, for those with less intense needs, 11% of providers felt that they received less support than they needed.

The data also showed that for one in fifty 16 and 17 year olds in the accommodation we sampled, there is no support on offer. Speculatively, we could conclude that local authorities and providers are not always accurately assessing how much help young people still require even when they appear to be quite self-sufficient and have low needs. This finding supports our general argument that, when placed in this accommodation, 16 and 17 year olds are often being asked to cope with adult levels of support and supervision even though they are still children under the law. Feedback from young people involved in our projects suggests that this may be a wrong assumption.

‘you are given a world in care and then it gets taken away from you.’

This evidence also reveals another key difference between provision that is unregulated and regulated for children. In both foster and children’s residential settings the provision of two hours of support a fortnight would not be deemed acceptable. Whilst unregulated accommodation is commissioned to provide less support there does appear to be a very large difference in the levels of support offered.
2.2.2 How well prepared are providers to deal with safeguarding concerns?

Chapter one showed that 16 and 17 year olds in supported accommodation face a number of complex and serious risks, from substance misuse to child sexual exploitation. So in our survey we asked providers questions about their responses and readiness to deal with safeguarding concerns.

On the whole, accommodation providers appear to have basic safeguarding policies in place:

- **90%** of providers responded that they have a safeguarding lead in their unit.
- **Every provider has a written safeguarding procedure statement.**
- **50%** of providers had a local ‘safety plan’ which identifies specific local risks to young people and attempts to reduce them.*
- **95%** of respondents make safeguarding referrals about the young people in their care to the local safeguarding team.
- **85%** of providers have a written procedure outlining what happens if a young person goes missing from the accommodation.
- **75%** know that their local police force treat 16 and 17 year olds missing from their accommodation as high risk and make it a priority to find them.

Over two thirds follow up every safeguarding referral with either a phone call, an email, or directly with the young person’s named social worker.

*This is a statutory requirement for residential children’s homes but these kinds of providers do not have to have one.*
2.2.3 Working with partners

What is also clear from the survey is that this key safeguarding is being performed by staff who are not highly skilled:

- Over 50% of respondents will employ staff who only have experience of working with young people, have no qualifications and will require in job training.
- Only 26% of providers require their support workers to have a Level 3 NVQ or equivalent.
- 75% of providers employ a safeguarding lead who is not a trained social worker.
- Only 25% of providers offer accredited safeguarding training to their volunteers.

Considering the high level of vulnerability 16 and 17 year olds have, it is an issue of concern that the safeguarding response is carried out by staff who might not have the skills and training to properly respond to all the risks faced by young people. Furthermore staff with better skills might be in a better position to help early and prevent violence thus reducing the need for calls to the police.

We asked some additional questions about the extent to which accommodation providers are required to work with partners to safeguard young people. The responses give some significant cause for concern:

- 44% of providers were either never, or only occasionally asked to contribute and be involved when young people in their care were being assessed by children's services and meetings were taking place to plan additional support for them.
- 30% of providers had no involvement with their local safeguarding children board, 34% only received information and updates and 30% had only been involved in order to supply information about a specific case that was being reviewed by the board.
- Whilst 39% of providers had regular contact with their named contact at the local police only 17% had regular contact with their named safeguarding contact at the local authority.
- Whilst local authorities had provided training on safeguarding referrals and child sexual exploitation to over two thirds of providers, less than half had received training about alcohol and substance misuse (both of which were indicated to be a higher risk by providers than sexual exploitation).

Only 18% had received training from their local authority on what to do if a young person went missing despite the fact that local arrangements vary substantially and different police forces respond in different ways.

We asked providers to comment on the requirements placed on them by their local authority in regards to safeguarding and some of the answers were of particular interest.

Some providers had very high standards: all staff from full to part time are required to carry out 'six pieces of training every year'.

Others reported that 'no duties are placed on us by the local authority' or that they had 'ever received specific instructions' from their local authority.

Typical answers stated that all that was required was 'observing, recording and reporting' or similar but even within this basic requirement standards can vary. For example one provider said that its policy when making safeguarding referrals was to follow up 'within four weeks' despite the fact that local authorities have a statutory duty to acknowledge a referral and let the organisation know their immediate course of action within one working day.
We wanted to find out about a range of different professionals that accommodation providers might interact with. The results are displayed in the Graph I.

There are a number of interesting findings in this area. The professionals accommodation providers are most likely to have had no contact with are Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs). This suggests that LSCBs are failing to involve providers in their planning and oversight functions. The highest intermittent contact came from Youth Offending Teams, adding weight to our findings about the high level of police involvement in the lives of these vulnerable young people.

Equally high intermittent contact comes from CAMHS and local authority safeguarding contacts. This supports our findings that mental health is an important concern for accommodation providers. It is unnerving that contact with the local authority for safeguarding is not regular, but rather intermittent. Worse still that 22% of respondents had no contact with their local authority concerning safeguarding.

It is also worth commenting on the fact that providers report more regular contact with the job centre than they do with local schools and colleges. These 16 and 17 year olds are still children who, since the raising of the participation age should be in some sort of education or training and yet providers are more likely to be in contact with the job centre which is designed for those looking for full-time work or in need of benefits only available to those outside of education.

When you consider the severity of the risks faced by 16 and 17 year olds in this accommodation it does not seem appropriate that statutory actors like local authorities and LSCBs allow a state of affairs where contact between themselves and the providers of accommodation is minimal. And when you consider the complexity of the risks faced by 16 and 17 year olds living in this accommodation there is an argument to be made that staff employed to support young people need to be more highly skilled.
2.2.4 Are other organisations helping providers to meet young people’s needs?

We know that different charities, statutory bodies and organisations might be asked to support a young person along with their accommodation provider. We wanted to find out how support needs were shared out locally and how much local authorities are asking of accommodation providers.

We gave providers a wide list of needs including different financial, personal and health needs and asked them to tell us if they, or another organisation were able to help young people with them.

Of interest is that for every single need we listed, more than 100 of the 118 providers surveyed told us that they were able to meet that particular need in house. The only need providers were less likely to provide was support to overcome substance misuse, although this scored highly too, with 93 providers able to offer support in this area. This finding demonstrates how accommodation providers see value in being able to self-describe themselves as a ‘one stop shop’ to meet all of a young person’s needs. What we could not ascertain through this survey however was the quality of this support.

In our focus groups the quality of the support clearly varied:

‘without [my host], I don’t think I would have managed’ one participant told us.

Whereas another said:

‘they don’t get any money [to support] me so they don’t bother’

Often providers indicated that there were also other options locally for meeting a particular support need. In Graph J we present what other organisations provide support to young people alongside the accommodation provider.

The graph shows how in three of the four categories of support examined local charities are the second biggest provider of support after the accommodation provider themselves. Local authority and government agencies do work to provide some support in areas that are considered to be highly important for independent adult life like employment and training but rarely provide more holistic kinds of support.

On the whole it appears that accommodation providers see value in being able to offer a range of support in house to young people. What we do not know about however is the standard of this support which will of course vary across the sector. With providers being responsible for meeting so many of a young person’s needs we feel the case is strengthened for better oversight, monitoring and standards in the sector to ensure that young people’s needs really are being met in a holistic manner.
2.3 What needs to change?

The 16 and 17 year olds found in this accommodation, should under the law, all be treated the same. Whether they have been looked after for many years, have recently entered care, are homeless, or are starting to leave care, they should all (except the care leaver) be living in this accommodation under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 as a looked after child. If they live in this accommodation for 13 weeks they will all be eligible for care leaver status on leaving the care system and should receive all the benefits outlined in Appendix Two.

In practice, the legal entitlements in Appendix Two should translate into real support. These young people should have social workers or personal advisors, they should have helped make plans about their future, they should be in education, employment or training, they should have enough money to survive, and they should have a GP and a dentist. Their needs should be met holistically in a way that is unconditional regardless of the mistakes they might make or the problems they may need to overcome.

The survey with the accommodation providers on the other hand showed that in practice the level of support varies and that a high number of young people with intense needs do not receive enough support.

Even though the accommodation providers we surveyed responded that they have safeguarding policies in place it is concerning that safeguarding duties and support for vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds are usually carried out by staff with no relevant qualifications. And that safeguarding bodies such as LSCBs are failing to involve accommodation providers in their planning and oversight functions. The survey also revealed that that contact with the local authority for safeguarding is not regular, but rather intermittent. 22% of respondents had no contact with their local authority for safeguarding at all.

We recommend that the following changes are made:

**Department for Education**
- The government should introduce regulation concerning the care of children in these settings. This should be inspected against by Ofsted and follow extensive consultation with the sector. In the short-term the department could consider a sector-wide practice improvement programme or stronger statutory guidance.

**Local government**
- As part of their commissioning of accommodation local authorities should stipulate exactly what support services they would like to be provided and should stipulate the level of provision they require; for example if the support be accredited. As part of their commissioning guidelines they should stipulate that advice or support needs to be meaningful and not just a leaflet or poster.
- Local authorities must ensure that young people understand what the provider has been commissioned to support them with. They should be able to hold the provider to account through established channels with the assistance of an advocate if necessary.

**LSCBs**
- LSCBs should examine local provision of this kind of accommodation and assign a named LSCB contact to all providers. This could include consultation with young people to establish their views about this type of provision.
- LSCBs and local authorities should offer a comprehensive safeguarding training programme to accommodation providers to make sure that all their staff are aware of local processes and have the appropriate skills to safeguard young people.

**Police**
- Police forces should work with local authorities to identify every local provider and establish good working relationships with them through a named contact, this role would be well-suited to the current missing person or child sexual exploitation (CSE) co-ordinator.
On your own now
The risks of unsuitable accommodation for older teenagers
Chapter three: Local authorities and sufficient, safe accommodation
3.1 Why have we focussed on sufficiency strategies?

There is already some evidence that there is a lack of consistent and effective planning for, and commissioning of, services that meet the needs of young people aged 16 and 17 who may need accommodation. Our earlier report, Getting the house in order found that 64% of homeless 16 and 17 year olds housed by their local authority were being accommodated under the Housing Act or as ‘children in need’ under the Children Act rather than becoming looked after children as the guidance, and the courts, require.\(^5\) The guidance is clearly not followed by some local authorities when it comes to 16 and 17 year olds.

The Association of Directors of Children’s Services’ own position statement on care for adolescents states that “as a nation we need to acknowledge that our approach to “care” does not work particularly well for adolescent entrants”\(^5\) because it offers them a crisis-based model and does not take as long-term approach as it does for younger children.

Local authorities have a duty to plan sufficient accommodation in their area for all children and young people who might require it. They are asked to do this by first establishing the level of need and then mapping this against current local provision. They are required specifically to think about looked after children, care leavers, and children who may need to become looked after at the age of 16 or 17 and outline their plans in sufficiency strategies. This is why we decided to take a closer look at how these sufficiency strategies are meeting the needs of older children.

We reviewed the strategies to establish:

- explicit reference to provision for those aged 16 and 17
- whether the local authority provided a full estimate of the number of young people aged 16 or above it would need to accommodate. We broke this down beyond just those young people aged 16 and 17 in care to include those leaving care and other particular groups with very specific needs like homeless young people, those exiting the youth justice system and needing accommodation, or older unaccompanied migrant children
- whether the local authority adequately estimated the number of 16 and 17 year olds on the edge of care. Unlike younger children on the edge of care, this age group are more likely to need accommodation, often on an emergency basis, whilst problems at home are addressed
- what accommodation was on offer and how many beds were available to enable us to compare provision against population
- strategies local authorities were pursuing to ensure that they were meeting the needs of this age group.

There are 152 local authorities in England with a sufficiency duty and each should provide a publically available strategy that demonstrates how they are meeting need. We managed to gather 102 strategies (67%) through either searching for them on a local authority’s website or making a request to children’s services to share it. The remaining 50 strategies were either not available, or in the process of being updated. Of the 102 we collected only 72 were up to date and contained data for the calendar year of 2014. Most of those out of date were only out of date by one year, but there were a small minority that were more than two years out of date. The sample therefore represents 47% of all local authorities in England with a sufficiency duty.
3.2 What did we find?

The sufficiency strategies we reviewed for this report suggest that local authorities are not robust in their commissioning and planning for placements for older children aged 16+. It was often this part the strategy that was the least clearly defined.

3.2.1 What groups do sufficiency strategies consider?

It is clear that at a strategic level local authorities are not fully considering the number of 16 and 17 year olds they will need to accommodate. This is of concern, as without accurate numbers to provide to commissioners children’s services run the risk of having inadequate supply and having to rely on spot-purchasing placements.

Spot-purchasing is the term used when services buy provision for each child individually rather than having a contract already in place with guaranteed accommodation. Spot-purchasing ‘has been found to be inefficient’57 in terms of managing the cost of placements, but it is also a risk for the young person as a placement organised in haste is unlikely to meet all their needs and may result in them being placed in accommodation where the providers have not had time to put in place the training and safeguarding procedures necessary to properly care for a 16 or 17 year old.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>70%</td>
<td>Of the sample, 70% offered an exact figure of how many children in care were aged 16 or over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Whilst 62 strategies mentioned care leavers, only 25% give an exact figure of how many care leavers they are currently responsible for*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Only 1 strategy quantified the number of 16 and 17 year olds assessed to be ‘in need’ under the Children Act 1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15% of Local Authorities identified how many 16 and 17 year olds were entering care each year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75%</td>
<td>75% of strategies referenced a specific group of 16 and 17 year olds who might have specialist needs like homeless young people or those exiting youth justice institutions**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Whilst 70% mention the needs of a specific group only 30% attempt to put any estimate on the population of this group in order to inform sufficient commissioning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* We included all care leavers aged 16-21 in this analysis – it was extremely rare for local authorities to offer a breakdown of care leavers by age

** The full list of specialist group was: homeless young people, those exiting the youth justice system, unaccompanied and asylum seeking migrant young people, young people with disabilities, young people using local children and adolescent mental health services, parents under the age of 18, those needing accommodation on safety grounds (i.e. to move away from gangs or the perpetrators of sexual exploitation) and those fleeing domestic or honour-based violence.
3.2.2 What provision do the strategies plan for?

- Of the 72 in date strategies, 62 (86%) discussed their provisions under ‘other arrangements’.

- The most popular forms of accommodation were supported accommodation and supported lodgings which were provided by 64% and 60% of local authorities respectively.

- The proportions of the different accommodations are displayed in Graph K.

- On average, of those local authorities discussing this accommodation they were able to offer three different types of accommodation. The most common three accommodation combinations were supported accommodation, supported lodgings and floating support.

- Whilst 54% of the 72 strategies were able to provide information about exactly how many beds they commissioned in a single setting, only 26% could provide how many beds were commissioned in more than one setting.

The analysis of the sufficiency of provision highlights some key concerns. Whilst local authorities usually mention these settings and often consider the style of accommodation provided they often fail to attach numbers to this discussion. In failing to do this they are likely to find themselves failing to commission a sufficiency of high quality provision and are again forced to spot-purchase beds.

In order to evaluate the lack of fit between the populations requiring this accommodation and the provision on offer we selected a sub-sample of 32 local authorities who were able to provide data about both the size of the 16+ population in need of accommodation and the amount of accommodation on offer. On average these 32 local authorities were commissioning 62% of the accommodation needed to meet the population they had identified in their strategy. Even in this small subset of data, representing only 21% of local authorities in England, and with higher quality strategies than the others we examined, the outcomes varied widely. Commissioning ranged to 1% of need in one local authority to 306% of need in another.

The picture becomes worse when provision for children that is regulated is compared against the unregulated provision. It would be highly unusual to read a sufficiency strategy that did not explicitly identify shortfalls in the number of foster carers, adoption placements and beds in children’s homes. When these other arrangements are considered however rigor seems to slip away.

‘I am not sure where I would go if I went back down the council. I could end up in a hostel or a bed and breakfast.’

Homeless young person
3.3 What needs to change?

In Table 1 we outlined the national guidance that relates to accommodating 16 and 17 year olds in ‘other arrangements’ and unregulated settings. In the preceding section we have demonstrated the considerable lack of focus in local strategies on meeting the needs of 16 and 17 year olds who may have housing needs regardless of whether they are counted as looked after children or are living in accommodation provided by housing services.

Local authorities are taking ever more innovative approaches to providing accommodation. While the care leaver and homelessness guidance require joint working between housing and children’s services, many councils are going further than joint working. The sufficiency strategies revealed a variety of approaches with some areas seeing consortiums, or pooled commissioning between different councils, working together to provide a youth accommodation pathway. Whilst this may be a more efficient way of commissioning services we need reassurance that this is not resulting in young people being placed far away from their friends and community.

Our concern is that if children’s services do engage effectively with the process of commissioning and securing accommodation for all vulnerable children in their area, the most vulnerable children may fall through the gaps and be placed in accommodation that is neither safe nor meeting their needs.

The analysis suggest that there is a real lack of engagement from children’s services in informing, commissioning and securing good quality accommodation and support for young people aged 16 and 17, for both the looked after population and those who are accommodated in ‘other provision’ under the Housing Act. This raises real concerns around safeguarding as without children’s services close involvement there is little way of knowing whether accommodation providers are being provided with the support and guidance necessary to keep very vulnerable children safe.

While the evidence from our practice suggests that the safeguarding needs of young people aged 16 and 17 who are housed by local authorities, but do not become looked after, or of looked after children placed in ‘other’ unregulated arrangements, are as big and challenging as the needs of looked after children of the same age who are in foster care placements or children’s homes, the difference in the guidance provided is striking. For example, the number of pages in the guidance dedicated to ‘other’ arrangements runs to six pages. Residential children’s homes, at the other extreme of the spectrum, have their own separate regulations and attendant guidance. The regulations total 44 pages and the accompanying guide has 81 pages.

There is also a very apparent lack of oversight of such arrangements. For example, while children’s homes have a separate inspection regime, ‘other’ arrangements, housing very vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds, are only subject to scrutiny at the commissioning stage. Quality assurance is left to other organisations and frameworks like Supporting People and the Foyer Federation.

Considering this evidence we recommend:

**Department for Education**

- The Secretary of State for Education must update the sufficiency guidance to state that the commissioning of accommodation for vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds should be underpinned by data on young people who present as homeless, those on the edge of care, vulnerable groups of young people approaching the age of 16 and vulnerable groups already 16 or 17 years-old. The guidance should also make it clear that the same level of rigor in planning accommodation is required for all types of provision – including ‘other arrangements’
Local government

- Local authorities must provide a calculation of the population of 16 and 17 year olds requiring accommodation under ‘other arrangements’ and a subsequent calculation of the number of placements available in every sufficiency strategy. Any shortfall identified must be addressed by specific actions to ensure a suitable range of accommodation is available.

- Local authorities should ensure that their sufficiency strategies and the parallel strategies produced by housing services to commission their young people’s accommodation pathway both explicitly explain how co-ordination between children’s and housing services occurs in relation to services provided to all 16 and 17 year olds. This co-ordination must address safeguarding arrangements in all kinds of accommodation.

- Local authorities must review their commissioning strategy to stipulate that providers must have policies on safeguarding, sexual exploitation, running away and going missing, drug and alcohol misuse, evictions and unplanned moves and violence prevention in order to bid for contracts. These policies should be reviewed by a senior social worker in the local safeguarding team.

- Local authorities should review their commissioning cycle and ensure that effective scrutiny of providers occurs during the commissioning process. There are a number of innovative ways this could be done beyond the standard background and financial checks. Young people could help to interview providers about the support they will offer, for example.

- To ensure standards are maintained throughout the life of the commissioned contract, and unless further regulation and inspection is forthcoming from national government, local authorities should consider doing their own inspections at regular intervals.
On your own now
The risks of unsuitable accommodation for older teenagers
On your own now
The risks of unsuitable accommodation for older teenagers
Chapter four: Independent adults
Moving into adulthood can be a very complicated experience. Young people who cannot live at home aged 16 and 17, are likely to struggle more than most, due to their vulnerabilities. The support offered by local authorities to transition into independent adult living very much depends however on whether or not a young person is eligible for care leaver status. Not all children who have been looked after by their local authority are eligible for care leaver status and the number of benefits it confers (see appendix two). In fact, it is often very difficult to work out if a young person is eligible.

The support care leavers are entitled to includes a grant to set up their first home, increased housing benefit support through an exemption from the Shared Accommodation Rate, personal advisor, finance to meet the costs of their education and help with finding suitable accommodation. For those who have had foster placements they may be able to ‘stay put’ with their former foster carers up to the age of 21. Those in ‘other arrangements’ do not have the option to ‘stay put’ but they do receive additional protection against homelessness until the age of 21. Local authorities must record; between the ages of 19 and 21 whether or not they have contact with their care leavers, if they are in education, employment or training and whether or not they have somewhere suitable to live. Leaving care services have been found to vary in quality across England but they are a statutory requirement, are inspected by Ofsted and should improve over time. Local authorities then have clear incentives to support and improve the lives of their care leavers.

For those young people who do not qualify for care leaving support there is very little support and very few protections. 16 and 17 year olds are eligible for assistance with homelessness but once they turn 18 they will no longer receive this additional protection. Some young people may qualify for support from the adult services, but these are likely only to be young people with quite severe learning difficulties or disabilities that mean they are unlikely to ever be able to live alone without some form of support. Furthermore, due to the non-statutory nature of provision for young adults, they often find their services under threat in the current budgetary climate face by all local authorities.

And so, whilst housed in the same accommodation the day to day experiences of those 16 and 17 year olds in care were unlikely to be that different from those not in care, their experiences, as they age, are likely to diverge over time.

Earlier we reported that 84% of accommodation providers responded in the survey that they provided ‘moving-on’ style accommodation to the 16 and 17 year olds in their care. For many of the young people living in this accommodation their time there is limited. From the moment they arrive they know they will have to move on. Providers are incentivised, through local authority commissioning to prepare young people for independence as their first and primary duty.

For young people living with their families the incentive to move on, to live alone, is usually absent. The Office for National statistics estimated that in 2012 more than 51% of 21 year olds still lived with their parents and that 35% of 24 year olds did.

Vulnerable young people aged 16 and 17 on the other hand are being asked by local authorities to prepare for independent living from a very young age. For those who have been in the care system for many years this may be a welcome prospect - many very much want to leave care behind them and they know that they will receive care leaver support until they are at least 21. For other young people the situation is different. For those who have recently come into care, or having been living in this accommodation without being designated a looked after child, the situation is more complex. They may not qualify for care leaver status and they may be extremely worried about what the future holds. For homeless 16
and 17 year olds, accommodated by housing services there is no ambiguity. From the moment they turn 18 they will be alone and if their tenancy breaks down or they face new challenges with which they cannot cope they are unlikely to receive no support. They are very much on their own.

All of these young people regardless of their status need ongoing support in order to develop into confident and independent adults. If the right support is not provided there may be costs to both the young person and wider society.

We wanted to look more closely at these challenges. We have already learnt in the previous section the extent to which providers try to meet a number of young people’s needs – some of which were based around preparation for independent living – but in this section we will look at some of the risks associated with turning 18 and try to establish the kind of circumstances young people find themselves in when they are being pressured to live independently.

We asked providers to tell us a number of things about what happens to the 16 and 17 year olds who turn 18 whilst they are in their care. While 84% of provider stated that they offered moving on accommodation it was positive to see that 96% of providers told us that young people do not have to move out when they turn 18 but instead can stay until they are ready to move on into independence.

We wanted to find out if the different provisions under which 16 and 17 year olds are living in this accommodation had any consequences on the way their placements were paid for when they turned 18. 26% of providers told us that in their experience the way the place ment is paid for does not change upon a young person’s 18th birthday. 34% told us that payment method does change upon turning 18 suggesting that for a third of providers the young people they accommodated cease to be paid for by children’s services and the young person must make their own arrangements. 39% reported that the payment method changes occasionally - indicative of the range of different practices that appear to be in place across England.

We asked respondents to tell us how support and financial arrangements change at 18. Graph L shows that whilst on balance the majority of young people’s financial situation is likely to stay the same there is a definite lean towards them actually improving slightly with 29% of respondents suggesting that a young person’s financial situation was likely to improve slightly upon turning 18.

### Graph L – How things change on turning 18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial</th>
<th>Support</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;15% increase</td>
<td>&lt;15% increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;15% decrease</td>
<td>&lt;15% decrease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15% - 30% increase</td>
<td>15% - 30% increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30% - 45% increase</td>
<td>30% - 45% increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;45% increase</td>
<td>&gt;45% increase</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 What did we find?
Conversely it is clear that other kinds of support for young people falls off a cliff upon turning 18. 42% of respondents stated that support decreases significantly, with a further 19% saying it decreases a little.

In a free text box we asked providers to tell us what their major concerns were as a child turned 18 in their accommodation. The answers focused, in order of magnitude, on support needs, housing needs, financial problems, mental health needs, becoming personally responsible for their actions, new risks and educational needs.

Support needs where by far the most commonly mentioned. Support like key workers, mental health services, help with accessing education and drug and alcohol services were all mentioned. Whilst 8 providers explicitly spoke about how they worried about the withdrawal of financial support from children’s services many more, some 36 providers, talked more holistically about how so many of their support needs went unmet from the age of 18.

This finding was mirrored in our focus groups, with one participant telling us that:

‘as soon as they think you have got a job, then your life is going well...[and]... you don’t get as much support then’

When considering housing needs, providers worried most about the end of the homelessness duty towards the young people leaving them without support if things went wrong. Some spoke of the:

‘pressure to move to independent accommodation and receive no further support. Often they are simply not ready.’

and others about how despite them being adults:

‘the fact that they are 18 is arbitrary’

and many were not in a position to sustain a tenancy on their own.

Financial worries centred on council tax, going on Job Seekers Allowance and dealing with a host of other benefit changes.

What was clear from the answers was the enormity of the challenge facing these young people. Providers are acutely aware of this challenge - they know these young people and recognise just how much they will struggle and yet it is clear they feel beholden to local authorities who appear to constantly want to move young people on and continue to make requests for beds for other young people.

‘They kicked another 18 year old out. Her social worker came and told her she had seven days to leave.’

Homeless young person
4.3 What needs to change?

It is clear that providers really worry about what will happen to the young people they accommodate once they move on. Much of this concern centres on their support needs and their financial and housing situations. In order to improve things we would recommend the following change:

**Joint guidance on 'Provision of accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds who may be homeless and/or require accommodation'**

- The update to the guidance on the provision of accommodation to homeless 16 and 17 year olds should stipulate that regardless of the provisions a young person is housed under, local authorities must ensure that before the young person turns 18 they have assisted them in putting in place all the necessary benefit claims to make sure that they can continue to live independently.

**Department of Communities and Local Government**

- The priority need categories for determining homelessness relief under the Housing Act 1996 should be amended to state that up to the age of 21 all young people who have lived in supportive accommodation, regardless of status, should be categorised as 'priority need' for homelessness services.

**Department of Work and Pensions**

- The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions should, when making the forthcoming changes to housing benefit eligibility for 18 to 21 year olds include an exemption for all young people who lived in supportive accommodation aged 16 or 17 regardless of status.

**Department of Education**

- Our new recommended status of 'vulnerable 16 of 17 year old' for those who refuse to become a looked after child under section 20 should provide the same services that are currently provided to care leavers to homeless 16 and 17 year olds. Critically this support should, as it does for care leavers, extend until they reach 21 years of age, or 25 if they pursue higher education.
On your own now
The risks of unsuitable accommodation for older teenagers
Conclusions and recommendations
The evidence in this report makes a compelling case for the accommodation and support provided for 16 and 17 year olds to be put under closer scrutiny. The evidence from local authorities suggests that accommodation commissioned under the ‘other arrangements’ provisions of the Children Act 1989 does not receive the attention and rigor as other more traditional settings.

In our survey or accommodation providers it is clear that there are issues around safeguarding young people from serious risks. Many of the young people in this accommodation fall outside the looked after system and without social workers, placement planning and regular review they are left at risk of their situations spiralling out of control. For 12% this could result in an eviction or an ‘unplanned move’.

Finally this report raises important questions about what happens to those vulnerable 16 and 17 year old children who, because they do not receive care leaver support, face an extremely difficult transition to adulthood.

Below is a re-statement of all our recommendations organised by those targeted at central government, local government, accommodation providers, and other relevant organisations. Taken together, they should go some distance to ensuring that all 16 and 17 year old children receive better support to prepare them for adulthood and safer homes to live in.
Central government

Joint guidance on ‘Provision of accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds who may be homeless and/or require accommodation’

■ The Secretaries of State for Education & Communities and Local Government must review and update the 2010 guidance on accommodating homeless 16 and 17 year olds. This update should ensure:

■ That the previous rule, which prohibited the use of bed and breakfasts for the accommodation of 16 and 17 year olds, is re-instated in full. Currently the Secretary of State for Education deems bed and breakfast accommodation acceptable in an emergency for up to two days.

■ That young people who have refused looked after status are given the right to become looked after under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 if they find that they cannot cope living under the provisions laid out in the Housing Act 1996.

■ That when a young person is subject to an eviction or an ‘unplanned move’ whilst living under the provisions of the Housing Act 1996, children’s services must re-assess them under the Children Act 1989 to see establish whether their needs would be better met under section 20.

■ That regardless of the provisions a young person is housed under, local authorities must ensure that before the young person turns 18 they have assisted them in putting in place all the necessary benefit claims to make sure that they can continue to live independently.

Department for Education

■ The government should introduce regulations for how children living in this accommodation are cared for. This should be inspected against by Ofsted and be done following extensive consultation with the sector. In the short-term the department could consider a sector-wide practice improvement programme or stronger statutory guidance.

■ For those 16 and 17 year olds who refuse to become looked after the Secretary of State for Education should create a new status of a ‘vulnerable 16 or 17 year old’ which would allow greater flexibility of responses but ensure the same level of entitlements and support as looked after children.

■ The government must update the statutory guidance to the Children Act 1989 to extend the measurement of looked after children’s emotional and behavioural problems (currently performed using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire) beyond the age of 15 to include 16 and 17 year olds. This measurement should be augmented for all looked after children and young people to include measures of subjective wellbeing and mental health.
On your own now
The risks of unsuitable accommodation for older teenagers

Department of Communities and Local Government

- The Housing Act 1996 should be amended to prevent 16 and 17 year olds from ever being classified as ‘intentionally homeless’.
- The priority need categories for determining homelessness relief under the Housing Act 1996 should be amended to state that up to the age of 21 all young people who have lived in supportive accommodation, regardless of status, should be categorised as ‘priority need’ for homelessness services and the law should be changed to prevent this category of priority need from ever being designated as ‘intentionally homeless’.
- The Department of Communities and Local Government should collect data from local authorities to establish how many former bed and breakfasts have been reclassified as accommodation providers and the number of vulnerable young people who have been placed in this kind of accommodation.

Ministry of Justice

- The government should amend the Psychoactive Substances Bill currently in passage in Parliament to make it an aggravating factor to sell any controlled drugs, including psychoactive substances in the vicinity of residential children’s homes and supportive accommodation for young people.

Department of Work and Pensions

- The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions should issue guidance that any 16 or 17 year old who applies for housing support, either within universal credit or through existing channels, should be immediately referred to make a homelessness application so that they can be assessed by children’s services and receive additional help and support to ensure they can maintain their tenancy.
- The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions should, when making the forthcoming changes to housing benefit eligibility for 18 to 21 year olds include an exemption for all young people who lived in supportive accommodation aged 16 or 17 regardless of status.

Ministry of Justice

- The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions should review how direct payments are made on behalf of vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds to reduce the chances of young people getting into rent arrears or debt due to other charges made by accommodation providers that fall outside the scope of Housing Benefit.

Local government

Improved sufficiency strategies

- Local authorities must provide a calculation of the population of 16 and 17 year olds requiring accommodation under ‘other arrangements’ and a subsequent calculation of the number of placements available in every sufficiency strategy. Any shortfall identified must be addressed by specific actions to ensure a suitable range of accommodation is available.

Improved commissioning

- To improve the commissioning of accommodation local authorities must:
- Review their commissioning strategy to stipulate that providers must have policies on safeguarding, sexual exploitation, running away and going missing, evictions and unplanned moves and violence prevention in order to bid for contracts. These policies should be reviewed by a senior social worker in the local safeguarding team.
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- Review their commissioning strategy to stipulate that providers must outline what training they will put in place to ensure that their staff can properly safeguard 16 and 17 year olds. Local authorities should offer their own training to providers based on understanding and working within local procedures and protocols.

- Ensure that young people get to meaningfully participate in the commissioning of this accommodation so that their views are better known and the accommodation is better designed to meet their needs.

- Review their commissioning cycle and ensure that effective scrutiny of providers occurs during the commissioning process. There are a number of innovative ways this could be done beyond the standard background and financial checks. Young people could help to interview providers about the support they will offer, for example.

- Ensure standards are maintained throughout the life of the commissioned contract, and unless further regulation and inspection is forthcoming from national government local authorities should consider doing their own inspections at regular intervals.

- As part of their commissioning of accommodation local authorities should stipulate exactly what support services they would like to be provided and should stipulate the level of provision they require; for example if the support be accredited. As part of their commissioning guidelines they should stipulate that the advice or support given should be meaningful and extend beyond leaflets and posters.

- Local authorities should commission accommodation that can provide quality support to help young people access mental health services in order to reduce the risks poor mental health can pose to a young person sustaining their tenancy.

- Local authorities should ensure that their sufficiency strategies and the parallel strategies produced by housing services to commission their young people’s accommodation pathway both explicitly explain how co-ordination between children’s and housing services will happen in relation to services provided to all 16 and 17 year olds. This co-ordination must address safeguarding arrangements in all kinds of accommodation.

- Local authorities must ensure that young people understand what the provider has been commissioned to support them with. They should be able to hold the provider to account through established channels with the assistance of an advocate if necessary.

Public health

- Local authorities should, as part of their Joint Strategic Needs Assessments focus on the health needs of all young adults requiring accommodation in supported or homeless accommodation and plan effective responses to their complex health needs, including their mental health.
Accommodation providers

- Accommodation providers should seek guidance from their local authority about how to put in place policies to safeguard 16 and 17 year olds from specific risks like running away, sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, substance misuse, violent behaviour and poor mental health.

- Accommodation providers should proactively seek to integrate their organisation into the local structures for safeguarding children if they accommodate 16 and 17 year olds. This should include making contact with the local safeguarding hub, children’s services, the LSCB and the police if they have not already done so.

- Accommodation providers should always seek to find out under what provision a 16 or 17 year old is placed with them and familiarise themselves with the different kinds of support and entitlements this results in.

- Accommodation providers put in place in-house policies to reduce the number of evictions and unplanned moves. This should pay particular attention to creating a ‘moving on’ process that prevents young people from having to re-present as homeless to their local authority which could result in an ‘intentional homelessness’ decision.

Others

Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs)

- LSCBs should examine safeguarding in this accommodation and assign local providers with a named LSCB contact. They could also consider consulting with young people to establish their views about their personal safety in this accommodation.

- LSCBs should offer a comprehensive safeguarding training programme to accommodation providers to make sure that all their staff are aware of local processes and have the appropriate skills to safeguard young people.

- The risks faced by this group of young people need to be mapped and assessed by the LSCB.

Police

- Police forces should work with local authorities to identify every local provider and establish good working relationships with them through a named contact, this role would be well-suited to the current missing person or CSE co-ordinator.

Clinical Commissioning Groups and CAMHS

- Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) should always be commissioned to provide services for 16 and 17 year olds and providers of CAMHS should put in place fast track access schemes for all young people living in these settings as there may only be a short window of opportunity to engage a young person in treatment.

Ofsted

- Ofsted should work with the Department of Education on the introduction of a new regulatory framework. This work should include a thematic inspection of current provision, involvement in the pilot study and consultation in advance of the introduction of any new inspections framework.

- Ofsted should carry out a thematic inspection to establish safeguarding consequences when a young person in this kind of accommodation is evicted or subject to an ‘unplanned move’.
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The Children’s Society

It is a painful fact that many children and young people in Britain today are still suffering extreme hardship, abuse and neglect. Too often their problems are ignored and their voices unheard.

About our work with 16 and 17 year olds

Last year The Children’s Society worked with over 34,000 children and young people across England. 1,600 of these young people were aged 16 and 17. They included homeless young people, care leavers, those at risk of sexual exploitation, children in care in need of advocacy, others who had run away from home or from care, young migrants and some who needed counselling.

We know these young people are vulnerable and need more help and support. Where they live is often of central importance to whether or not they will succeed. It is for this reason that we present their stories in this report and that we campaign publically for them, through our ‘Seriously Awkward’ campaign to make sure their lives can continue to improve.

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Names used in this report have been changed to maintain anonymity. All photographs posed by models.