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Consultation outcome

# Inspecting supported accommodation: our response to the children and young people's consultation

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# What was the consultation about?

This year, Ofsted will start inspecting services that are registered to provide supported accommodation for looked after children and care leavers aged 16 or 17. This is to make sure the services are helping young people and keeping them safe, and that the accommodation itself is of the right quality.

Supported accommodation can be a place where a young person:

- lives in self-contained accommodation (such as their own flat or bedsit) – this may be on their own, but it may be with their partner or child
- has their own bedroom in accommodation shared with other looked-after children and/or care leavers
- has their own bedroom in accommodation shared with people who may not have been in care
- lives in a private house or flat with someone who supports them (we usually know as 'supported lodgings')

More information about supported accommodation is in the [guide to the supported accommodation regulations](#).

Last summer, we made some proposals about the way will inspect when we start inspecting later in 2024. We set up 2 online surveys and asked people what they thought about our suggestions.

## How many people replied to the surveys?

In all, we received 280 responses to the 2 online consultations (222 responses to

the main consultation, and 58 to a young people's version). We also talked to professionals who run, or work with, supported accommodation services.

We held regular workshops and meetings with care-experienced people. They helped us to plan the consultation. They also gave us their views on what inspections should look like.

We are very grateful to all the people with experience of the care system for sharing their expertise with us.

## Proposal 1: 3 possible inspection outcomes

We proposed introducing 3 possible inspection outcomes, replacing our usual set of judgements.

In most of our inspections (e.g. of a children's home, or a school), we judge whether the service:

- is outstanding
- is good
- requires improvement to be good
- is inadequate

But for supported accommodation inspections, we suggested something different.

We thought that single or two-word judgements wouldn't be right. Supported accommodation comes in lots of shapes and sizes. Some providers will be registered for many different properties, across more than one type of accommodation. We wanted the outcomes – we have decided not to call them judgements provide a little more detail. We proposed the following 3 possible outcomes:

Consistently strong service delivery leads to typically positive experiences and progress for children. Where improvements are needed, leaders and managers take timely and effective action.

The next inspection will be within approximately 3 years.

Inconsistent quality of service delivery adversely affects children's experiences and limits their progress. Leaders and managers must make improvements.

The next inspection will be within approximately 18 months.

Serious or widespread weaknesses lead to significant concerns about the experiences and progress of children. Leaders and managers must take urgent action to address failings.

The next inspection will be within approximately 6 months.

## **What people said**

Most of the people who replied to the main consultation (61%) agreed or strongly agreed with this proposal. Young people were more likely to agree.

A few people thought that Ofsted's usual 4-point judgement scale was easier to understand for the people involved in children's social care and the general public.

Quite a lot of people felt that the second outcome was too negative, and that it needed to be changed.

## **What we will do**

As most people agreed with the proposal, we will introduce the 3-outcome model. But we agree that the second outcome is too negative. We have changed its first sentence to:

'Inconsistent quality of service delivery adversely affects some children's experiences, and this may limit their progress.'

We will look at this outcome model again after the first round of inspections to see if it has worked well and whether any of it needs changing.

## **Proposal 2: to give 2 working days' notice of inspection to providers**

The notice period is the time between telling the 'provider' of the supported accommodation service that we will be inspecting them and actually starting the inspection.

### **What people said**

Most people (58.5%) agreed, or strongly agreed, with our proposal.

Many people, especially those with lived experience of the care system, said that we should keep any notice period to an absolute minimum. We should see the settings as they are on a normal day-to-day basis.

Out of those who disagreed, there wasn't a clear difference between the number who thought the notice should be longer and the number who thought it should be shorter. But young people were the most likely group to say that we should give less notice to providers before we start an inspection. Providers of supported accommodation services were more likely than any other group to want a longer notice period.

Those who wanted unannounced inspections, or a shorter notice period, were worried that 2 days' notice meant that inspectors were less likely to see the everyday reality for young people.

### **What we will do**

We have thought very carefully about the feedback we have had, especially about young people's worries that too much notice may mean we don't see how things really are for young people.

We won't arrive on site until 2 days after we announce the inspection, but the inspection starts when we call the provider to say we will be inspecting them. Any information we gather in the 2 days off site, when we may also talk to young people and professionals, will be part of the evidence that we use to reach our judgements. We will make this very clear to providers.

The off-site time will give inspectors time to look at all the information we have about the providers. It will help inspectors decide (and arrange) where to go and who to speak to. Many providers have accommodation spread over a wide area, so visits will need some planning. The same is true for visits to children. Many will be busy if inspectors arrived unexpectedly, or at short notice. Some children may need help to prepare for a discussion with an inspector.

We think a 2-day off-site period strikes the right balance. It keeps the notice we give to a minimum while giving us a short amount of time to plan and make the best use of our time on an inspection. We want to make sure we can gather the evidence we need to reach the right judgements.

Importantly, if we are worried about children's safety or well-being, we can visit providers without any notice.

## **Proposal 3: the main features of effective supported accommodation**

To help make sure we focus on the issues that matter most for children, we asked for views on what effective supported accommodation should look like.

### **What people said**

Nearly everyone agreed or strongly agreed with our suggestions (82% of the people who replied to the main consultation; 92% of those who replied to the young people's survey). Many, including those who disagreed with our suggestions, added

helpful comments.

Young people said that the important issues for inspectors to look at are:

- mental health support
- help to develop life skills
- help with planning for their futures

Support to manage money and prevent poverty were important too.

Lots of people said that how well young people are supported to maintain and develop lasting, supportive relationships should be at the heart of inspections.

Some people who replied, including some children's charities, did not agree with our suggestions. This was mainly because they believe that no young people under 18 years old should be in supported accommodation, and that all children should be in the type of care that is more usually given by children's homes, or by foster carers.

We understand that there are lots of different views. We will expect providers to meet the legal standards and provide the kind of high-quality support that all young people in supported accommodation deserve. We'll take the necessary action if that support isn't good enough. We will speak to the local authority if we think that a young person isn't ready for supported accommodation and needs a greater level of care.

## **What we will do**

We have listened carefully to all the feedback and have tried to make sure it is covered in our evaluation criteria (which inspectors use to help them reach their judgements). It'll be an important focus of our training for inspectors too.

## **What we will do next**

We are publishing the [full inspection guidance](#) at the same time as this report and the [full report of our response to the consultation](#). We are also publishing a [summary of the research evidence](#) that we reviewed in December 2022:

We expect to start inspections from September 2024.

This is later than we had originally planned, due to the very high number of applications to register we have received.

We need to prioritise our registration work. Many of the providers are already accommodating looked after children and care leavers aged 16 to 17. We want to visit these providers as soon as possible to make sure they are fit to operate. We can't inspect providers until they are registered.

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