

Ofsted consultation on inspecting supported accommodation

Briefing for housing associations

July 2023

Summary

On 10 July, Ofsted [published](#) a consultation on proposals outlining how Ofsted will inspect supported accommodation for looked after children and care leavers aged 16 to 17. The consultation asks for views on how supported accommodation should be inspected, proposals relating to inspection outcomes, the notice Ofsted will give of inspections and the main features of effective supported accommodation.

The [consultation](#) runs from 10 July to 8 September 2023 and will inform Ofsted's arrangements for inspections starting in April 2024.

This briefing outlines the [proposals](#) and asks members to answer [questions](#) to inform the NHF's response to the consultation. NHF members may wish to [respond to the consultation](#) themselves as well.

Introduction

On 10 July, Ofsted [published](#) a consultation on proposals for how Ofsted will inspect supported accommodation for looked after children and care leavers aged 16 to 17. The consultation asks for views on how supported accommodation should be inspected, proposals relating to inspection outcomes, the notice Ofsted will give of inspections and the main features of effective supported accommodation.

Ofsted began accepting applications to [register providers](#) of supported accommodation in April 2023, when [regulations came into force](#). Regulation and inspection intend to provide oversight and assess whether children in supported accommodation are safe and well supported.

The [consultation](#) runs from 10 July to 8 September 2023 and will inform Ofsted's arrangements for inspections starting in April 2024.

Ofsted will use the responses to this consultation to inform new arrangements that they aim to introduce from 2024. They expect to begin inspections of supported accommodation for looked after children and care leavers aged 16 and 17 in April 2024.

We encourage members to [read through the proposals](#) and [respond to the consultation](#). If you need an alternative format, please email eyregulatoryandsocialcare@ofsted.gov.uk.

Please read the below and share your answers to our [questions](#) by **21st August**.

What are the proposals?

Ofsted proposes:

- To introduce a 3 outcomes model for the first round of inspections of supported accommodation.
- To give a period of 2 working days notice of inspection.

Ofsted would also like to hear your views on the main features of effective supported accommodation. Your views will help Ofsted focus on the things that matter most for children and help establish the detailed evaluation criteria that inspectors will use as a benchmark for effective practice.

Ofsted says that because this is a newly regulated sector that does not yet have an established benchmark for excellence, there is no outcome that identifies exceptional practice. They will use the learning from the first round of inspections to inform longer-term inspection arrangements in the future, including how they make judgements.

Outcomes

For the first round of inspections, Ofsted propose that there should be three (3) possible outcomes for inspections of supported accommodation:

1. **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.

2. **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.
3. **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.

When evaluating progress, Ofsted will take into account individual children's starting points and circumstances during inspections.

Ofsted believe this proposal reflects the unique context and wide scope of supported accommodation, providing a nuanced statement of quality across diverse provision. This means that Ofsted will not use their usual 4-point scale for graded judgements for supported accommodation inspections in the first round of inspections.

The model does not yet offer an outcome that identifies exceptional practice. Ofsted feel this would not be appropriate for a newly regulated sector, where there is no established benchmark of excellence. They will report on excellent practice within their reports. The first outcome ('Consistently strong service delivery...') will help Ofsted and the sector develop an understanding of the characteristics of strong or excellent services.

Inspections

Ofsted will register and inspect at the 'provider level'. They will register providers that may operate more than one setting across several categories of accommodation. They will not register individual premises used as supported accommodation but all accommodation must meet the required standards.

The regulations set out 4 categories of accommodation:

- **Single occupancy.**
- **Shared accommodation** (ring-fenced for looked after children and care leavers only) – each child will have their own bedroom but will share communal areas; there may be care leavers over the age of 18 living at the accommodation.
- **Shared accommodation** (not ring-fenced for looked after children and care leavers) – looked after children and care leavers aged 16 to 17 may be living in this accommodation with other people who are not care-experienced and aged over 18.

- **Supported lodgings.**

It is not clear whether supported lodgings will be for single children or several and whether multiple spaces will be “ring-fenced” for looked after children and care leavers or not.

Providers may apply to be registered for several categories of accommodation. Ofsted will visit a “representative sample” of accommodation during inspections. Ofsted will inspect each provider at least once in a 3-year cycle, but will return earlier to weaker providers.

Ofsted will make requirements when regulations are breached. They will also make recommendations for improvement. When necessary, they will carry out monitoring visits to assess progress against requirements and recommendations. Published reports will provide a concise summary of the reasons for the inspection outcome.

Social care common inspection framework

Ofsted will carry out inspections of supported accommodation under the [social care common inspection framework \(SCCIF\)](#). They believe that the principles for social care inspection as set out in the SCCIF remain applicable:

- **To focus on the things that matter most to children’s lives** – basing the outcomes of inspections on the difference that providers are making to children.
- **To be consistent in expectations of providers** – wherever possible, Ofsted will use the same evaluation criteria across the same areas of evidence for all SCCIF inspections and will gather evidence across the core SCCIF areas of evidence, as listed in the proposal of three possible outcomes.
- **To prioritise work where improvement is needed most** – Ofsted will return earlier to inspect weaker services that were judged to have serious and/or widespread weaknesses at their last inspection. Ofsted will retain the right to return earlier than usual to any provider where they have concerns. They will determine the frequency of inspections for all services through regular risk assessment.

Notice of inspection

Ofsted propose to give two (2) working days’ notice of inspection to providers. They say this is the minimum notice required to deliver effective and efficient inspections

and is consistent with the notice that Ofsted give for other 'provider-level' social care inspections.

Ofsted say that having a short notice period rather than an unannounced inspection will help inspectors to arrange a suitable timetable for the inspection, including arranging to hear from children about their experiences. It will also give inspectors time to analyse the pre-inspection information and develop the right lines of enquiry. They can then make best use of their time on site and gather the best possible evidence.

Ofsted's published inspection guidance will set out clear information about:

- The information that they will require from providers when Ofsted give notice.
- The usual inspection activity.

Evaluation criteria: Main features of effective supported accommodation

The below evaluation criteria describe what Ofsted consider to be the benchmarks of effective practice and will be what Ofsted expect to see during inspections. Inspectors will evaluate their evidence against these benchmarks and their evaluation will inform the outcome of the inspection.

Ofsted's inspections of supported accommodation providers will consider the following areas of evidence:

- Overall experiences and progress of children.
- How well children are helped and protected.
- The effectiveness of leaders and managers.

To help shape the final evaluation criteria, Ofsted want to hear views on the main features of effective supported accommodation. These views, in addition to existing research and the views of care-experienced community, will help make sure inspections focus on what makes the most difference to children living in supported accommodation.

Main features of overall experiences and progress of children

- The accommodation is of good quality and meets children's individual needs.
- Staff and supported lodgings hosts are suitably skilled and have strong relationships with children.

- Plans for children are effective.
- Children are supported to maintain strong, supportive social networks.
- Children are well engaged with the wider community.
- Children have good access to technology.
- Support for children responds to their changing needs.
- There is effective support for children's emotional and physical health.
- There is strong support for children's education, training and employment.
- Children have financial security.
- Children's views are heard and acted on.
- Children are involved in decision-making and plans for their futures.
- Children's rights and entitlements are met.
- Children are helped to develop practical and self-care skills.

Main features of how well children are helped and protected

- Children feel safe and settled where they live.
- Risks are identified, understood and managed effectively in order to keep children safe.
- Leaders and staff respond effectively to children who may go missing or may be at risk of harm.
- Staff manage situations well and apply and clear, consistent boundaries that contribute to children feeling safe.

Main features of the effectiveness of leaders and managers

- Leaders and managers have high ambitions and expectations for children, and are committed to achieving the best possible outcomes for them.
- Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the progress that children are making.
- Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the service's strengths and weaknesses, and take effective action as a result.
- Staff are well supported through supervision, induction and training.
- The service is achieving its aims and objectives, in line with its statement of purpose.
- There are positive and productive relationships between all professionals, which ensures the best possible support for children.
- Leaders and managers take prompt and appropriate action when the responses from other services are not effective.

- Leaders and managers actively promote equality and diversity, and tackle bullying and discrimination effectively.

Questions for members

We will submit a response on behalf of members. To help inform this response, please answer the following questions:

1. Should there be fixed inspection arrangements from the beginning or should the first round inform future practice? Should future rounds inform future practice as part of an iterative process?
2. Does two days feel like reasonable notice of inspections? Do you have any specific concerns about inspections e.g. staff capacity?
3. How long should inspections take?
4. What would be a “representative sample” of accommodation to inspect?
5. Is a 3-year cycle an appropriate length of time for inspections (with earlier return to “weaker providers”)?
6. Is the [social care common inspection framework \(SCCIF\)](#) an appropriate framework for inspecting supported accommodation for looked after children and care leavers aged 16 to 17?
7. Do you agree with the three possible outcomes for inspections of supported accommodation? Are they relevant to your service and clear? Do they reflect the unique context and wide scope of supported accommodation?
8. Are the evaluation criteria identified the main features of effective supported accommodation? Are they appropriate criteria to evaluate good supported accommodation for looked after children and care leavers aged 16 to 17?