

Analysis of the 16-25 Years Supported Accommodation Service

The following is an analysis of how the service under the current framework has been performing, changes made and future projections.

Background

Sheffield City Council has an urgent need to secure sufficient placements for our Children in Care 16- and 17-year-old and Care Leavers. It has been apparent that increasing demand is being driven by:

- Nationally increasing numbers of Children in Care
- Demand for in-city supported accommodation placements has increased as our 16–17-year-olds wish to remain in city.
- Increase in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs) requiring a placement.
- The requirement for supported accommodation providers for 16- and 17-year-olds in care and care leavers to become Ofsted registered, regulated, and inspected. From 28th October 2023, Providers are required to have registered with Ofsted followed by a future inspection.
- The potential for some supported accommodation providers to exit the market or fail the Ofsted registration, resulting in SCC having to find alternative accommodation for our 16–17-year-olds.
- Significant competition for placements leading to increased costs as neighbouring local authorities are trying to secure similar placements in Sheffield.

Since 15th February 2022, local authorities have been mandated to accept UASC under the National Transfer Scheme, resulting in a significant growth in the number of Young Refugees looked after by Sheffield. The size of the current population is now presenting an unprecedented and growing challenge to existing resources and organisational arrangements including placement sufficiency.

As of 12th July 2023, The Children Looked After Service and Leaving Care Service support a total of 178 unaccompanied young refugees, compared to 84 young refugees in 2020.

A significant proportion of young people who arrive aged 16-17 are placed in unregulated ‘other arrangements’ (Children Act 1989, Volume 2: care planning, placement, and case review June 2015) such as supported lodgings or semi-independent accommodation – initially with high levels of support to help them navigate and establish themselves in Sheffield.

The Local Authority receive financial support for UASC and Care Leavers from the Home Office to cover the costs of accommodation and support. However, at present Home Office funding is not meeting the full cost of accommodation for UASC by Sheffield City Council.

Therefore, we obtained permission to commission a Request for Quote (RFQ) for a 5 bedded ‘block’ 24-7 Group Living Supported Accommodation in Sheffield to assist in the safeguarding process of UASCs. This block agreement was agreed for 12 months 13th September 2022 – 12th September 2023. Further approval was granted on 31st October 2023 by Childrens Commissioning SLT to extend the current agreement until 30th September 2024 to bring it in line with the current Framework contract.

We are also seeing a higher number of 18+ year olds approximately (36.5%) of current placements that remain placed with our current providers as there is limited tenancies for them to move into, which is blocking potential placements for our 16–17-year-olds.

Block commissioning with providers still meant that our 16–17-year-olds would still need to be matched to the provision and consideration given by the provider and ourselves in relation to placing alongside other 16–17-year-olds. Therefore, there is always a risk that SCC purchases placements that may not be utilised to full capacity. This risk is therefore monitored jointly by our Placement Finding team and Commissioning. Moving forward with the new service specification, we shall ensure that there is a risk share clause in the new contract based on occupancy and utilisation, so the costs can be shared between both provider and us.

A further three 5 bedded 24-7 Group Living 'block' provisions was secured in city in May 2023 (15 beds in total) to secure provision for Sheffield 16–17-year-olds as demand for placements is outstripping supply, with neighbouring local authorities competing for placements and as a contingency should any of our current providers fail to gain Ofsted registration.

Impact on Ofsted Registration/New National Standards

In March 2023, the Government introduced new national standards for the registration, regulation, and inspection of supported accommodation for looked after children aged 16 and 17 years, which is to be overseen by Ofsted. These new standards are based on four key areas:

- Leadership and Management (Regulation 4)
- Child Protection (Regulation 5)
- Accommodation (Regulation 6)
- Support (Regulation 7)

Our Children in Care External placements team have worked closely with all our current providers throughout this year giving advice and support regarding the Ofsted registration process. Fortnightly 16+ meetings are held, chaired by our Director of Children's Service (Sally Williams) attended by wide range of service professionals to discuss any potential issues, should any of our providers look to be failing registration.

We have identified a few grey areas, that are not fully clear in the new standards, e.g. Fire Safety Regulations, need a clearer stance from Ofsted of their expectations. Also, we have identified that we need to include additional clauses in the new specification of areas that are not currently covered, for example, the safe storage of electric bikes, damp and mould, pets not being permitted, all staff on duty having full training on how to use fire equipment.

All the new standards will be embedded in more detail into the new contract to commence 1st October 2024.

Consultation Survey – The Views of Care Leavers in Sheffield

A consultation exercise was conducted by Brightspots between January 2023-April 2023. Brightspots is a research project that looks at a subjective wellbeing of children in care/care leavers. Brightspots is used all over the country, idea behind it is to use children and young people's voices to change services in a way that is meaningful for them, as we want to move away from looking at statistics that are set by professionals and measure things that do not necessarily include how children and young people are feeling about their lives. Brightspots survey as therefore asked 'what is good

Appendix A

about your life', 'what is not so good' as we need to focus on what the young person says is important to them.

This survey went out to all care leavers, we received a response rate of 28%, which we aim for a children's response rate of 30%, so just below. The bulk of responses came from young people aged 18-25 years.

Some of the things that have been working well.

- 94% of Sheffield care leavers have a smartphone versus only 92% nationally.
- 74% felt happy with where they live which is higher than the national average.
- 93% knew who their leaving care worker was and felt that it was easy to contact them.
- 85% felt involved in their Pathway planning some of the time.

Future projections for 16-25 Year Supported Accommodation Placement

As of September 2023, the current number of looked after children on a full care order aged 11-15 years was 170, that would potentially require a 16+ supported accommodation placement in next few years.

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