

Unregulated provision for children in care and care leavers



Responses from care experienced young people supported by Leicestershire Cares

Below are responses from five care experienced young people who we have supported to share their views on the government's proposal around unregulated accommodation for children in care and care leavers.

Each young person has their own experience and views, but in summary we found that they:

- **supported ending the use of independent and semi-independent provision for children under the age of 16.** The young people we spoke to often struggled with the move to independent living at the age of 16 or older, and unanimously felt that any child under the age of 16 need to be cared for, not simply supported in unregulated accommodation. They also felt that children aged 15 and under would not have the skills, emotional resilience or support networks to live independently.
- **highlighted that young people should only move into unregulated accommodation when they are ready, and should be supported to develop the skills needed to sustain this.** Young people need to be able to make informed decisions about whether they move into unregulated accommodation, the difference between (semi-)independent living and being in foster care or a children's home, and which property/provision they move into. Young people we consulted with spoke about making snap decisions to move into unregulated accommodation, or feeling pressured to take the first property they saw or was offered to them as they were told that accommodation was in high demand. This led to situations where young people ended up moving away from their existing support networks into properties where they felt isolated, unsafe and at risk of being exploited.
- **supported the introduction of new standards for unregulated accommodation.** In terms of quality of provision, young people emphasised that accommodation needed to be clean and of a decent quality. Security was also important, with young people stating that locks on bedroom doors is a must, and they want to feel safe in their home. Having the opportunity to bring in furnishings and create a space that feels like a home was also important. In terms of the support offer, young people emphasised that staff need to be open and friendly, approachable and willing to understand things from their perspective. They want to be taught the skills needed to budget, clean and manage a home (particularly money management) and feel it is important that staff encourage young people to engage in education, training and/or employment.

Young person 1

Age: 19

What are your experiences of independent living or unregulated accommodation?

I thought I wanted to live independently, so looked at some supported living options. Everywhere looked rank, so I decided to stay at my aunt's.

I thought I was ready to move out when I was with my aunty. It was strict living there. I wasn't allowed to cook my own food and stuff, I thought I'd get more independence, but the places I saw were disgusting.

The place I saw, I was told that people were doing drugs and alcohol there. They would have been bad influences. They said I would get support there, but I just didn't believe it.

When I looked round, I just got bad vibes from it. It wasn't clean. I thought that if I moved there it would change me for the worst. I was lucky I could still go back to my aunt's.

The place I looked at was in dodgy area of town, and my aunt wasn't happy that I might be moving there.

What do you think of the government's proposal to ban unregulated accommodation for young people aged under 16?

I think no one should move into semi independent or independent living before they are 16. I just don't think you are ready.

You probably need to be at least 17 before going into semi-independent and independent living.

You need to have life skills like budgeting, and cooking, but know how to look after yourself.

I think the pros of moving to a place like that would have been learning to cook and look after myself. There would be rules, but they would be adult rules, and you'd be treated like an adult. You'd meet new people, but the cons could be life wouldn't end up how you thought it would. You could get bullied, you could start to make some bad choices without the right support.

Do you think there should be a national standard for unregulated accommodation? If so, what should it cover?

If there was a national standard, the quality of the place wouldn't have to be too nice, but would need to be to a decent standard, not looking cheap. If the place looks cheap, it makes you feel worthless. Some places have private bathrooms. The place I looked at had one, but the bathroom was like a caravan's shower room. It was so small you couldn't move.

What support do young people need to make a successful transition into independent living?

I think the support the staff would have to give would be to teach you to cook, to budget, and how to keep up on college work. They don't need to be good at the subjects you are learning, they just have to be there to encourage you to keep on going. Stick at it.

The staff have to be open and friendly so we can talk to them if we have problems or feel down. They should be ready to talk to us about stuff like sex. You want staff to take an interest in us and keep an eye on us.

Young person 2

Age: 18

I was kicked out of a hostel when I was 16. I was too young and got mixed up with alcohol.

What are your experiences of independent living or unregulated accommodation?

I lived at my Dad's and he was an alcoholic and used to come home and hit me. I got onto my social worker and she said that she could find me a place in a hostel. I had a look at it and moved in a few days later.

When I saw it I thought it was perfect. It was better than my dad's and I just wanted a place for myself, rather than being with him. It was alright, I just regret getting kicked out really.

When I went to the hostel I had to move to a new area and didn't know anyone. Not having a stable friendship through life has had a big impact on me. When I was young, I left living with my mum and moved to my dad's. I had to move schools and lost all my friends then. I didn't really make new ones after that and then ended up in the hostel. The hostel has people coming and going so it is hard again to make relationships, although I have made one good friend and we are still close now.

I moved into a hostel when I was 16 and then I moved into independent living and I'm still there now. But I've had to move twice. The first place had rats. This place has cockroaches. They are all in my kitchen, under my fridge and in my microwave. The landlord just doesn't want to know.

What do you think of the government's proposal to ban unregulated accommodation for young people aged under 16?

I think at that age, you need to know some life skills like washing up, and budgeting. When I was 16 I didn't think that paying rent was a big deal, but when I moved out I found out that I had arrears to pay. You also need to know how to socialise, or be able to see the good relationships, rather than the bad.

When I moved into the hostel, I made some good friends, but I was young, and started drinking and coming back drunk. Obviously, you're not allowed to be in the hostel under the influence. I would talk to the staff in a disrespectful way and having fights with the people there. It was all due to alcohol really. The hostel was up to the age of 18.

I don't want to blame the other people there, but I wouldn't have got into drinking on my own.

Living on your own, you struggle to set your own rules, like sitting down and doing your homework. If you are young you are really going to struggle with keeping focused with your education.

Do you think there should be a national standard for unregulated accommodation? If so, what should it cover?

If a national standard were to come in for hostels, I'd say that a cleaner would be good. We had to clean the communal areas ourselves, and the bathroom was mixed and that was a big problem. I was the only girl in the hostel and the boys never cleaned the bathroom, so I had to clean that, and clean other people's mess, and poo, and toenails.

The support staff were there all the time, but they wouldn't do anything for you. They wouldn't clean up after you, but that is because they want you to learn to get on in life. The lady at the hostel helped me so much, and I'm still in contact with her now. She helped me find a new place to live.

I think the staff would need to be understanding. The staff I meet had also been thorough my situation so understood what was going on. Being aware of our issues is important.

Young person 3

Age: 18

What are your experiences of independent living or unregulated accommodation?

Moving into semi independent was the best thing to happen to me. I was really depressed and a friend's mum noticed things were going bad in my foster care. Moving here has given me a new outlook on life and has helped with my autism.

What do you think of the government's proposal to ban unregulated accommodation for young people aged under 16?

Money management is vital to get a handle of at an early age to do well in semi independent living, also being able to look after yourself, by cooking and cleaning.

You need to be able to have a decent conversation as you are likely to need those skills to make new friends as you never know who you might end up living with.

Do you think there should be a national standard for unregulated accommodation? If so, what should it cover?

If a new national standard came in, I think the quality of living would just have to be functional but at the same time allow you to make it your home. If you are allowed to make it feel like a home you will respect it more.

There has to be some kind of communal space. You can't be isolated in your home. You need to know that you can move around and not be stuck in your room.

These places are here to help you become more independent, so having a shared kitchen is good as it makes you more aware of other people and the need to tidy up after yourself.

I think locks on your bedroom doors help you with any anxiety you might have, and obviously you don't want to be anxious where you are living.

If you need help, it needs to be there and the staff have to be open and friendly, but at the same time able to give you space.

You still need to have house rules so everyone can get along and know where they stand. You don't own the house.

What support do young people need to make a successful transition into independent living?

The staff should also be there to help with employment skills, practicing job interviews, and help with understanding bills and tax, life skills like cooking and looking after you.

If you smashed a hole in the wall I would hope the staff would try and find out why you were angry enough to punch a hole in the wall. I think punishments should be suitable and sensible to the action. For example, if you did punch a hole in the wall, make you pay to get it mended, or even try and mend it yourself rather than call the police. That is just going to make everyone more stressed, you, the others living in the place and the staff.

There has to be a bond between the staff and house mates. You might have moved here because you needed to get out of your family, but you still need some kind of care a family might give you.

Young person 4

Age: 20

What are your experiences of independent living or unregulated accommodation?

My local authority was poor so didn't have many nice places for me to go. I ended up in a hostel at 16 while doing my A-levels. There was no upper limit in the hostel, so there were adults there, and I remember my room didn't have a lock on it.

Being in a hostel at an early age taught me to be self sufficient. You soon realise that you are on your own and no one is going to help you. It was the only choice I had, so I had to learn to swim or sink.

What do you think of the government's proposal to ban unregulated accommodation for young people aged under 16?

The right time to move into Semi or full independent living depends on the person. Can you cope with looking after your money, your food, being able to cook. Can you support yourself? Do you know how to ask for help or even know that you can ask for help. Do you have a support network?

I think social workers need to know your friendship circle and who are the responsible parents in your network. If there is a emergency situation and you have to get taken, it is best to stay with some friends for a few nights, until you are ready or safe to then move onto your next placement.

The dangers of moving into semi-independent living at an early age is that you are the only one to make sure you look after your education. You have no one on your back. Luckily for me I saw education as a way to get out of my situation. I could see a pathway – do well in my A Levels, get to Uni, get away, get a job, get a mortgage. I was moved about 12 miles away from where I had been. It didn't really worry me. Obviously traveling to college now took a lot longer, but I was focused on my education and knew that it was worth the hassle.

Do you think there should be a national standard for unregulated accommodation? If so, what should it cover?

If new national standards are put in place, I think one thing needs to be that your social worker look at your pervious challenges and issues and sit down with you to plan how they can be addressed in your new environment so you don't feel that you have just been dumped without a plan.

I think locks on doors are so important. How can you sleep when you have come from a bad situation into a completely new place, and know that anyone could walk into your room.

I think staff should make safety check on you, especially if you have just come from a bad experience.

I think an induction to a place is important, so you know where things are, how things work, what are the house rules.

Young person 5

Age:20

“If a member of staff walks in and wouldn’t want to sleep in there, then why should I?”

What are your experiences of independent living or unregulated accommodation?

I went into supported lodgings just before I was 18. I’m not sure the woman I lived with had any checks done on her. I think I was her first lodger from care. I soon got kicked out when social services didn’t pay my rent, as I didn’t have a job at the time. I don’t think she had another lodger after that.

I wasn’t getting on with my foster family, as I thought I knew it all, and wanted to stay out late, but they had a curfew. My social worker found a place for me but said that it was in high demand so I had to make my mind up quickly. I didn’t get a chance to meet the woman at the supported lodging before I moved in.

I ended up living an hour and half away from my foster family. I broke the good relationship I had with them because I just could never get to see them. I also lost my social circle as it became impossible to meet up with friends as at that age everything is done so spontaneously, by the time you get into town, your mates have finished shopping and gone home.

What do you think of the government’s proposal to ban unregulated accommodation for young people aged under 16?

I was just 18 and I struggled. I think going into semi independent living at 16 would really put you back.

People need to know how to reach out and ask for help. Sometimes when you are young you are stubborn or don’t know that you can ask for help or how to.

What support do young people need to make a successful transition into independent living?

You need to be taught about basic life skills. I still don’t know how to register for a dentist, because no one has ever taught me. Things that most people would just ask their mum becomes a mission to find out.

When you are in semi independent living you need someone to keep you in line. You don’t have parents telling you off when you do stupid stuff that teenagers all do. You don’t get it explained to you why its stupid and why you should stop. If you haven’t got parents looking out for you, you just carry on being stupid.

You also can get groomed and fall for things that you wouldn’t if you had caring adults in your life.

You might also fall for scams, like the other day I got a dodgy phone call from someone saying they were HMRC.

I think you need to be taught things like boundaries. We are young people that have been taught the wrong boundaries through our experience and need someone that can help us out with that.

Do you think there should be a national standard for unregulated accommodation? If so, what should it cover?

If new national standards come in for semi independent living then they have to have one thing at it's heart, and that is to make it feel like a home. We want a safe place. We are vulnerable and need checking in on. We want someone to keep an eye on us. I think there has to be an age limit on hostels that LAC are placed in.

The place doesn't need to be posh, if anything that might stop us wanting to make it our home. It just needs to make us feel safe. If a member of staff walks into your room and wouldn't want to sleep there, then why do I?