

# Learning Example: Effective Multi-agency Working when Supporting Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking Young People in Supported Accommodation

*This learning example was developed through the National Children Bureau's Sector Awareness and Provider Preparedness programme in relation to the mandatory quality standards and inspection and regulatory regime for providers of supported accommodation.*

*Interviews took place before the end of the initial registration window with existing providers of supported accommodation. Every effort has been made to ensure this learning example represents excellent practice across the sector and we have developed this resource with extensive reference to the regulations and quality standards. It is highly recommended that you refer to [Department of Education](#) and [Ofsted's](#) most up-to-date guidance to support the application and registration process. Any placement of a young person in care whose needs can be met in supported accommodation should only be met with a provider who is registered with Ofsted.*

With thanks to:

- 123 Supported Accommodation
- 1625 Independent People
- Avensis Support
- Places for People
- Salvation Army Housing Association (SAHA)

## Introduction

### The Sector Awareness and Provider Preparedness programme

This learning example is based on analysis of interviews conducted by NCB as well as sector intelligence gathered through the programme. It explores supported accommodation providers' perspectives of **effective multi-agency working** when supporting unaccompanied asylum-seeking (UAS) young people living in their settings.

Providers were asked a range of questions to understand their approach to accommodating UAS young people, including working with local community groups and the voluntary sector, the skills and experience of staff, supporting UAS young people to understand their rights and entitlements and planning their transition to living in supported accommodation.

## The legal framework for local authorities accommodating UAS young people

### Local Authorities

Local authorities have legal duties to make sure that unaccompanied 16- or 17-year-olds seeking asylum are provided with accommodation which is safe, nurturing and meets their needs. In doing so, local authorities must act in the young person's best interests, consider their feelings and views, and seek to secure the best outcomes for them.

### Supported Accommodation

Supported accommodation was previously a type of accommodation outside of regulated children's homes, kinship care and foster care, providing supported, semi-independent living for 16 and 17-year-olds. From 28 October 2023, to operate legally, all providers of supported accommodation for looked after children and young people aged 16 and 17 must either be registered or have had an application accepted as 'complete' by Ofsted. Providers must also meet mandatory quality standards as part of the Ofsted-led registration and inspection regime, which apply to all types of supported accommodation.

### Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People

In March 2023, there were 83,840 children looked after in England, with 7,290 of these being unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people. Over half of these UAS children and young people (61%) were placed in supported accommodation ([Children looked after in England statistics – Gov.uk](#), 2023).

Supported accommodation is not automatically the right setting for UAS young people, especially if they are not yet ready for greater levels of independence and preparation for adult living. There are other types of accommodation, such as foster care or residential care (children's homes) that may be more appropriate for UAS young people.

Local authorities must always consider the individual needs of the young person when making decisions about accommodation, ensuring their varying circumstances and histories are recognised and met by their care plan.

### 'Effective Multi-agency Working' and the relevant Quality Standards

The importance of multi-agency working is highlighted in the DfE's Guidance on the Regulations for Supported Accommodation, particularly in the Leadership and Management Standard, the Protection Standard and the Support Standard.

- The **Leadership and Management Standard** outlines that the registered person is required to "develop the service's effective working relationships with each young person's accommodating authority and with other relevant persons". This is described as strategic multi-agency working, listing 'schools, colleges, health and police' as key agencies providers should work with while supporting young people.
- The **Protection Standard** requires providers to "work collaboratively with other professionals and share information where relevant to keep children safe". This is underpinned by the 'working together' principles in the statutory guidance [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#), as well as guidance on [information sharing](#).
- The **Support Standard** outlines that providers should "ensure that processes are in place" so that young people can "access support from other organisations and community services". It is important staff consider the different needs of young people and how a range of services are likely to be involved in their support.

## What does effective multi-agency practice look like?

Providers interviewed by NCB shared a variety of approaches to working with agencies.

### Develop strong professional relationships

- The provider needs to develop and maintain strong relationships with the key professionals who work for the young person's accommodating authority, such as the young person's social worker, personal advisor, and independent reviewing officer.
- Working with the local authority helps to create a foundation for multi-agency working that is responsive, ensures young people's needs are met and enables young people to achieve the best possible outcomes. For example, teachers working at the virtual school can help improve the educational outcomes of UAS young people.
- Providers should also expect to work with professionals that are part of the wider multi-agency network such as educational settings, health, including mental health, police and youth offending teams and other voluntary or community organisations.
- Providers should understand the role of each agency within the UAS young person's professional network, clarifying different responsibilities in care and pathway plans, working collaboratively with external colleagues so that young people receive the right support when they need it. For example, ensuring UAS young people have a tailored health assessment that addresses the risks arising from their journey to the UK.

- It can be helpful to have a key contact in the young person's educational setting, GP and any other agencies involved, such as a counsellor. This means staff can contact professionals promptly when needed and prevent delays to support.

### **Understand young people's rights and entitlements**

- Staff are responsible for ensuring that UAS young people are aware of their rights as looked after children, such as the right to legal advice. There can be challenges in accessing local legal advice for UAS young people, and it can be helpful for providers to build a professional relationship with a solicitor in the local area who can offer advice and guidance to UAS young people living in their settings.
- Providers should put processes in place to inform young people about advocacy services and how to access them. This includes knowing that looked after children and care leavers should be given the choice to be represented by an independent advocate. For further information, see the statutory guidance on effective advocacy.

### **Work with the community**

- The **Support Standard** states that providers should support young people to access support from community services.
- Providers interviewed by NCB emphasised the value of creating connections and strong working relationships with key community organisations and individuals, such as faith leaders, to understand the support they could provide to UAS young people.
- Being connected to people from similar cultures is important to help UAS young people build resilience, through strengthening their cultural identity. It can also be helpful for providers to collaborate with local youth and community groups to offer an opportunity for young people to meet new people and integrate into the community.
- Engaging with local police and community wardens can help UAS young people re-establish trust in these services, if this is a challenge. Providers can help demonstrate the positive role that the police play in keeping young people safe in the community.

### **Information sharing and collaboration**

- The **Protection Standard** outlines the importance of robust information sharing mechanisms and collaboration to ensure young people are kept safe.

- Providers will need to ensure there are procedures in place to facilitate effective and timely information sharing with the accommodating authority and relevant professionals, particularly if a child protection investigation is underway.
- Providers reflected that effective information sharing protocols underpin a strong safeguarding culture, reinforced by policies and an ethos among staff working in supported accommodation to put the safety and wellbeing of young people first.
- Providers emphasised the importance of regular safeguarding training for all staff working in the provision. Safeguarding training should be regularly reviewed and linked to effective multi-agency working mechanisms.

## The impact of effective multi-agency working

### Stronger safeguarding practices

Timely information sharing helps staff working in supported accommodation to be more informed about risks to UAS young people's safety and working closely with the professional network can help problems to be resolved more quickly. UAS young people face particularly complex risks, such as risk of exploitation and trafficking, but a multi-agency approach can help ensure supported accommodation staff are better supported and share responsibilities with other professionals around the young person.

### The right support at the right time

Improving communication between key professionals and agencies creates joined-up support for UAS young people. Supported accommodation providers should try to expand the support options available for UAS young people living in their settings through making links with community groups. This creates a more cohesive community approach, where local authorities and providers have good working relationships with local community groups who UAS young people may feel they can trust more easily.

### Knowledge and skill sharing

The multi-agency professional network can learn from each other when they collaborate. Working closely with statutory partners like the police and children's social care can also help supported accommodation staff to learn about different statutory procedures and processes. Inter-professional learning, training and development opportunities within the supported accommodation provision can enable staff to feel more supported by a collaborative working environment.

## Challenges

### Contributions

Providers reflected on the varied levels of engagement and contributions from other professionals in meetings and support planning, and the impact this can have on joined-up ways of working. Cross-professional decision making can be time-consuming, and discussions should always aim to be centred on what is in the young person's best interests.

### Time management and coordination

Providers acknowledged that there is only a finite amount of time to respond to many different and competing priorities. Working with the wider professional network can be complex but listening to different perspectives – including the young person's - can help professionals better understand the needs and vulnerabilities of young people in care.

### Working with multiple local authorities

Providers have reflected on their experience of working with different local authorities accommodating UAS young people living in their settings. If a child or young person is placed out of the local authority's area, this can create challenges when sharing information or raising concerns to all relevant agencies.

## Key learning for other providers and local authorities

UAS young people are likely to have several different services involved in their support; supported accommodation staff should be aware of multi-agency working arrangements.

Providers of supported accommodation and local authorities may want to consider the following points to effectively embed multi-agency working into how they support UAS young people:

1. Multi-agency working requires **collaborating with statutory services** such as education and health, as well as community services such as youth and religious groups. Working with local community groups can help providers to support UAS young people to explore their religious and cultural identities, listening to their wishes and beliefs and supporting them to attend religious events as they settle into a new local area.
2. Clear communication channels and timely information sharing between key organisations creates a **network of joined-up professionals** who can provide cohesive support to UAS young people, particularly when addressing safeguarding concerns.
3. A **multi-agency safeguarding response** leads to more coordinated risk management and safety planning. All agencies should keep the young person in focus so that

specific needs can continue to be met while plans are put in place to keep young people safe. Providers should ensure that information sharing protocols are clear and understood by all staff.

4. **Collaborative thinking and working** should be at the heart of how supported accommodation settings are led and managed – with providers recognising the central role that they play in the professional network, ensuring that a young person's interests are listened to and prioritised.

We have additional information and resources about supported accommodation and support for UAS young people and professionals who work with them [on our website](#).

If you are a supported accommodation provider, our online Community of Practice offers an online space to share ideas and support – email [ncbsocialcare@NCB.org.uk](mailto:ncbsocialcare@NCB.org.uk)