

Item No. 6.	Classification: Open	Date: 20 April 2022	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		Semi-independent accommodation for children in care and care leavers	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		None	
From:		Alasdair Smith, Director of Children and Families	

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the corporate parenting committee note this report about children in care and care leavers living in semi-independent supported accommodation and the multi-agency support provided.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Who are children in care and care leavers?

2. A child in care, or looked after child, is defined within section 22(1) of the Children Act 1989 as being a person under the age of 18 who is either in the care of the local authority (i.e. the subject of a care order (section 31)) or provided with accommodation by the local authority exercising functions under the Children Act 1989 but not sections 17 (assistance to a child in need), 23B or 24B (support to a young person aged between 18 to 25, who was provided accommodation by the local authority during when a child).
3. A local authority is also required to accommodate children under section 21 of the Children Act 1989 when requested to do so by the police, following the child being taken into police protection on an emergency basis for their own safety, or they have been detained or on remand for criminal justice reasons.
4. Those children who have been looked after for 13 weeks or more from the age of 14, once 18 are defined under the Children Act as former relevant children. The local authority is required to continue to assess the needs of former relevant children and produce a pathway plan which must be regularly reviewed for promoting the young person's physical and mental health and wellbeing. The local authority is required to publish a local offer of what services it will provide to its care leavers. Where a former relevant child is pursuing education or training as agreed within their pathway plan, the local authority is required to consider what further support should be

provided to them up to their 25th birthday (section 23C). That support can be in the form of accommodation and in exceptional circumstances cash.

5. A broad discretion is available to local authorities to provide advice and assistance to any young person that was looked after for any period of time between the ages of 16 and 18 (i.e. can be less than 13 weeks) (section 24).

What is semi-Independent accommodation (SIA)?

6. There are as at 30 March 2022 69 children aged 16 and 17 living in SIA. 128 young people aged 18-21, and 38 young people aged 21+. This is based on recorded accommodation at time of last visit.
7. SIA (Supported Accommodation) is one of the range of accommodation options available for children in care over the age of 16 and care leavers aged 18+.
8. Accommodation options for children in care and care leavers include, foster care, residential homes and residential schools, placements with connected persons or parents, secure accommodation (including secure hospitals) and in addition to these options, children in care and care leavers over 16 can live in SIA.
9. Care leavers with significant additional needs may be assessed by adult services under “The Care Act” and if eligibility is established, provided with support and / or accommodation including provision that is regulated by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).
10. Identifying robust accommodation pathways for children is key to permanence planning.
11. Most types of accommodation are subject to regulatory oversight and frameworks although at present SIA is an anomaly as it is unregulated by OFSTED or other bodies. Nonetheless, children under the age of 16 and children and young people with “care needs” should not be placed in SIA.
12. Semi-independent accommodation (SIA) falls into 3 main categories:
 - I. 24 hour units – which tend to be around 6 bedded units (or occasionally larger) staffed by support workers 24 hours / day where young people are also provided with additional one to one key work hours to support the development of their independence skills and to progress areas identified in their Pathway Plans (PWP). Young people may have their own en suite bathrooms or share facilities including kitchens and living rooms.
 - II. Shared accommodation: two or three young people will “flat share” in SIA provision, with visiting keyworker support proportionate to their assessed needs.

- III. Stand-alone accommodation: Young people live in their own SIA flat also with visiting keyworker support proportionate to their assessed needs.
13. Rarely a bespoke one bed 24 hour SIA is commissioned when a young person cannot be placed with others and requires intensive support and supervision.
 14. It is usual to place younger and more vulnerable children and young people in 24 hour SIA due to the additional oversight and support that is provided in that environment, with young people graduating to a more independent setting as their independence skills develop and as they attain adulthood.
 15. When children and young people are placed a placement planning meeting takes place with the child / young person, allocated worker and provider so that the keyworker understands the areas of focus and ensures that the support is linked to assessed needs and targets that are set out in a co-produced pathway plan, and that other requirements are understood, such as frequency of keyworker reports.
 16. The purpose of SIA is to prepare young people for independent living and young people will leave SIA to take up more permanent and affordable accommodation in the form of council / Housing Association tenancies or private sector rented (PSR) accommodation.
 17. Once a young person is eligible to claim benefits, SIA costs can be reduced as they claim Housing Benefit, however, SIA is never an independently affordable or sustainable option for care leavers due to the cost, which cannot be covered wholly by benefits or waged income. SIA is only temporary accommodation. For this reason it is essential that there are sufficient supplies of affordable accommodation available to young people to support their sustainable independent living.
 18. The 16+ Children in Care and Care Leaver Service (16+ Service) is working with colleagues in Housing to identify PSR accommodation options for young people as a more permanent form of affordable accommodation for care leavers. This work is supported by the Service's Experienced Practitioner (EP) Homelessness and Housing, a role joint co-funded with Housing, MHLCG and Children's Services, although MHLCG intends to cease funding this key role and has already reduced grant allocation. It is intended that the work of the EP will be supported by establishing a Resettlement Officer post within the service to work alongside colleagues in identifying and expediting PSR accommodation.
 19. There has been much national advocacy for SIA to become a regulated form of accommodation. This means that the law through regulation would provide clearer direction about standards and requirements, as happens for foster care and children's homes. It is possible in the future that such regulation will be implemented although recently advocacy groups led by

Article 39 lost a legal case that may have forced the government's hand in requiring this.

20. If regulation of SIA for young people 16 and 17 years old was to be implemented there would likely to be a withdrawal from the market of providers who are unable to reach or maintain the required standards which is likely to decrease placement availability and potentially increase placement price as the supply decreases.
21. Southwark will need to determine how the usage and supply of SIA is managed and one approach is to ensure that care leavers are offered a fixed period in SIA to meet their needs before moving to PSR accommodation. Keyworker support can continue to be delivered to young people in PSR through the floating support element of the 16+ Support and Accommodation Contract (see below), or through spot purchasing if required.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

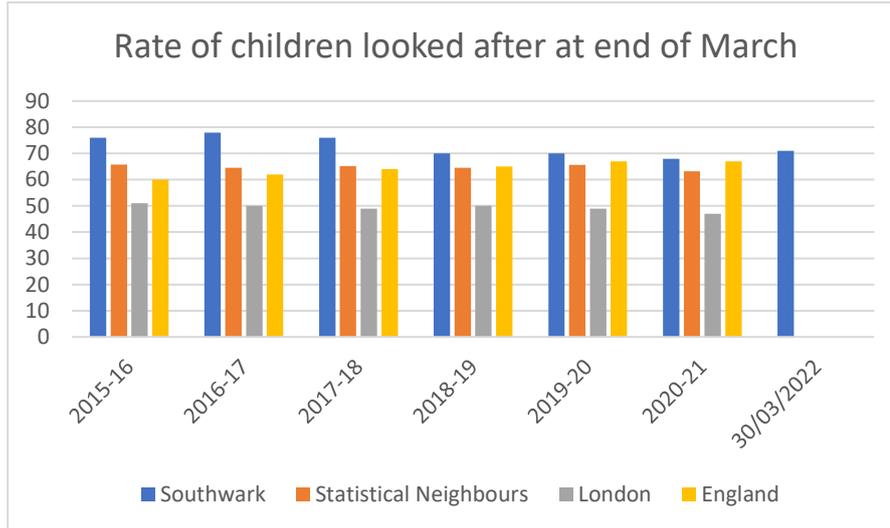
How many children in care and care leavers are there?

22. On 31 March 2022 the numbers were as follows:

Children in care (all)	463	
Children in care (16 or 17 years old)	180	(39%)
Children in care (16 or 17 years old and UAS)	66	(14%)
Care leavers (all)	567	
Care leavers (17-20 years)	300	(53%)
Care leavers (21-25 years)	264	(46%)
Care leavers (formerly an UAS child)	166	(29%)

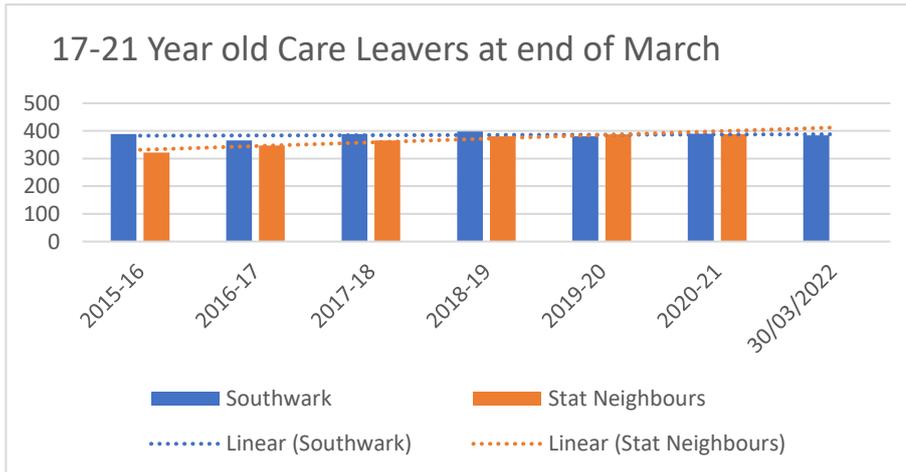
23. The number of Southwark's children in care has consistently been higher than that of our statistical neighbours, although the overall trend is reducing. In order to show comparator information for children in care, it is better to use the rate (number of children in care per 10,000 under 18 population). Chart 1 shows just how much higher Southwark's rate of children in care is.

Chart 1



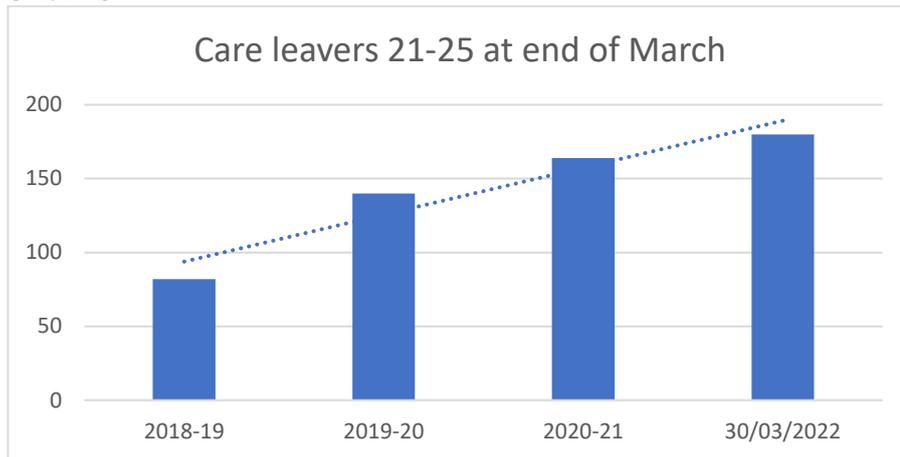
24. Chart 2 shows the number of care leaver aged 17-21 over the last six years along with statistical neighbour averages, and our provisional end of year position for 2021/22. As can be seen, the trend line for Southwark has remained relatively static and above statistical neighbours. It is important to note however, that statistical neighbour figures have been increasing over this time period.

Chart 2



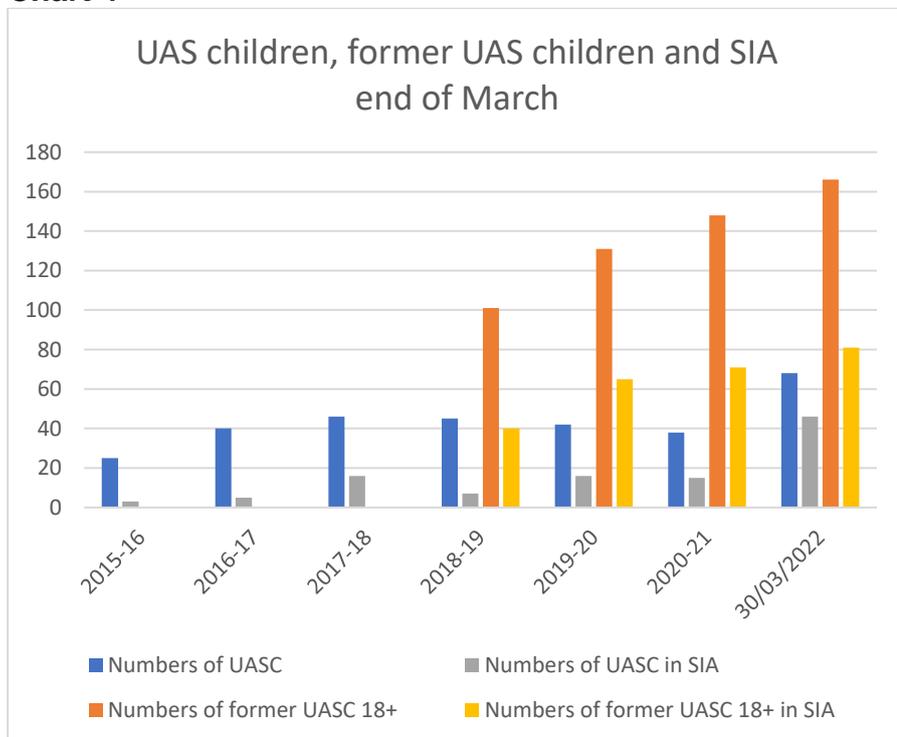
25. Whilst for Southwark, care leavers aged 17-21 have remained relatively static; since the change in legislation in 2017 whereby care leaver support was extended to the age of 25, the overall number of care leavers have increased. Benchmarking information for this age group of care leaver is not yet available as national data is not collected, however chart 3 shows the increases for Southwark in care leavers aged 21-25. Between 31 March 2016 and 30 March 2022 Southwark have had an overall 45% increase in care leavers eligible for support (based on all ages).

Chart 3



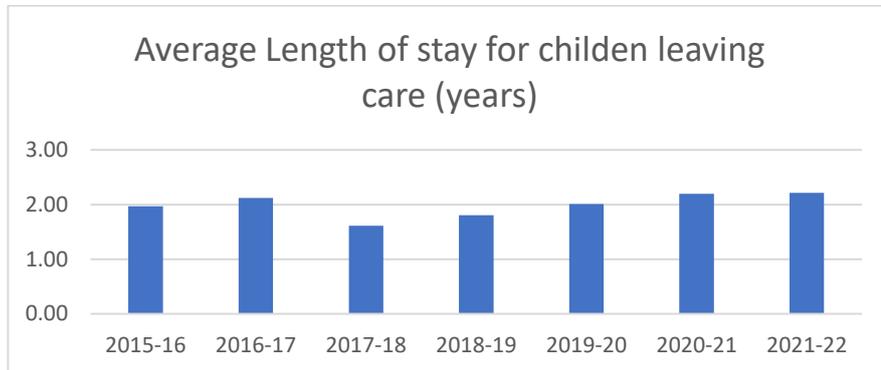
26. Chart 4 shows the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking (UAS) children from 31 March 2016 to 30 March 2022, along with the number of former UAS children, now care leavers, from 31 March 2019 to 30 March 2022 and of those, who are placed in SIA. The increase in UAS children has a direct correlation with the increased use of SIA.

Chart 4



27. Chart 5 shows that average duration (in years) of all children that ceased care in the those years'. As can be seen, the average length of stay has been increasing since 2017-18.

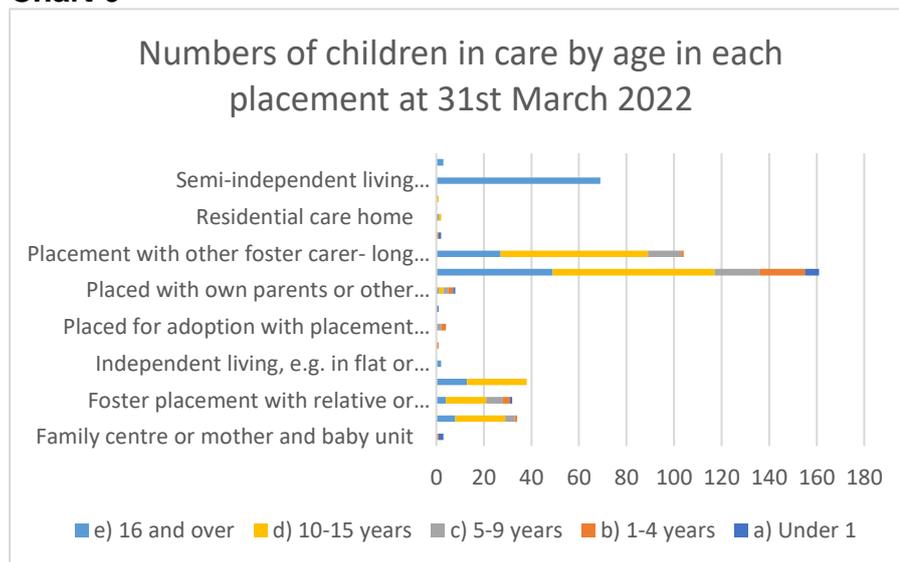
Chart 5



Who are the children in care and care leavers who live in SIA?

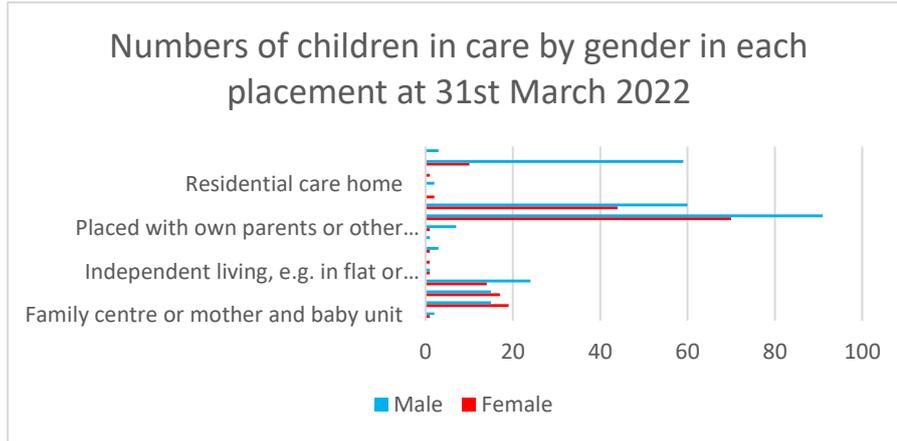
28. Chart 6 shows those in SIA are aged 16+ and make up nearly 40% of the 16+ cohort.

Chart 6



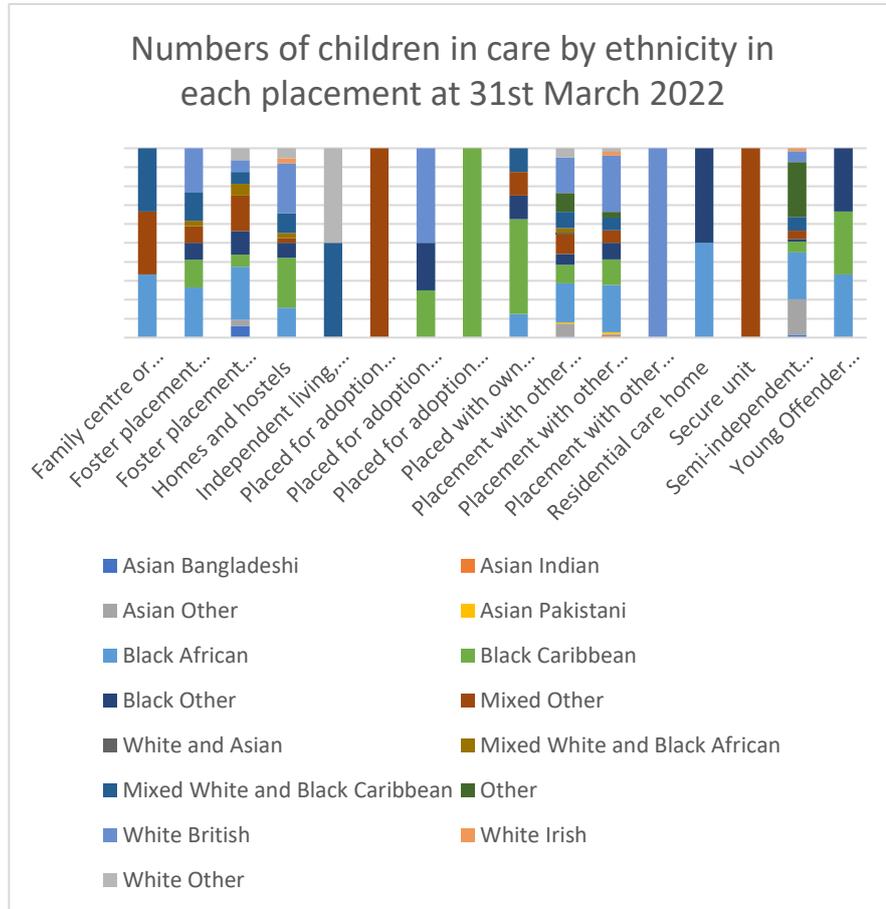
29. Chart 7 shows those in SIA are mainly male (86%).

Chart 7



30. Chart 8 shows children in care in SIA are mainly recorded as ‘other’ (29%) followed by ‘Black African’ (25%). Those ‘other’ are largely unaccompanied asylum seeking (UAS) children.

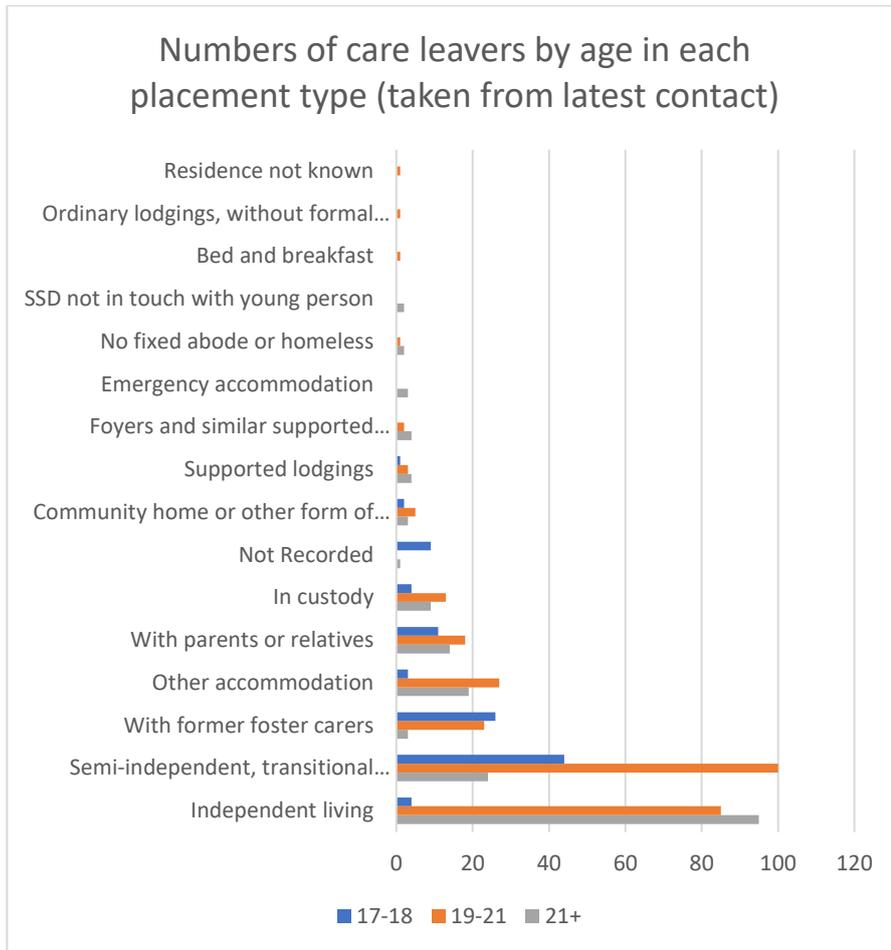
Chart 8



31. Chart 9 shows care leavers by age group and accommodation type based on the last contact with the care leaver. This is not benchmarkable data and is not calculated the same as the annual data return to DfE called the OC3. Note that this includes all care leavers aged 17+. SIA is the largest accommodation type for those aged 17-18, and 19-21. Across all age groups SIA is used 30% of the time. This

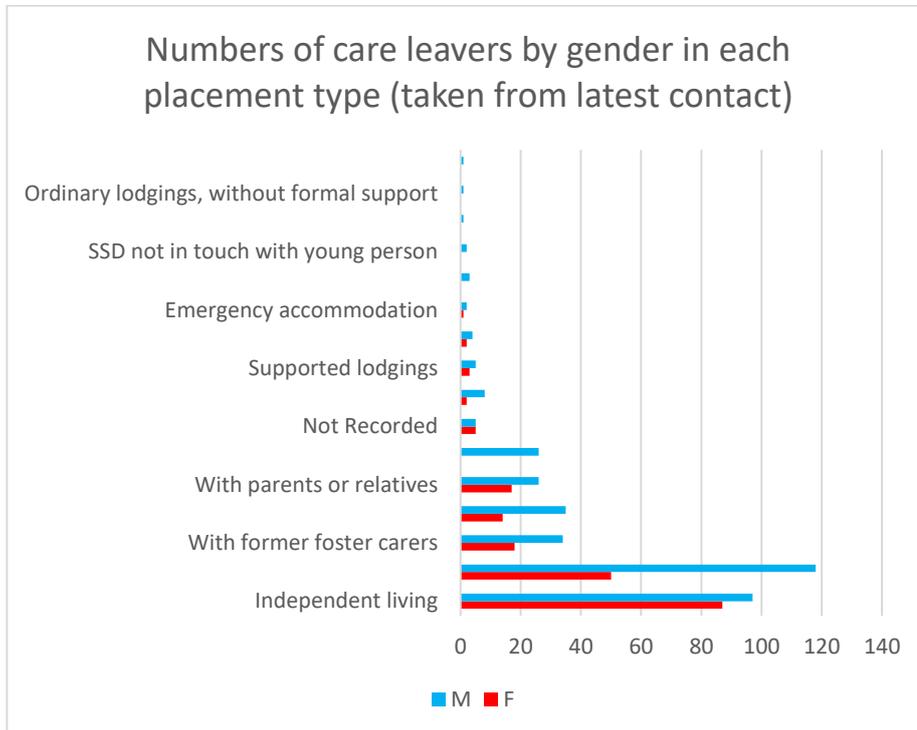
increased to 43% for those aged 17-18, and 36% for those aged 19-21.

Chart 9



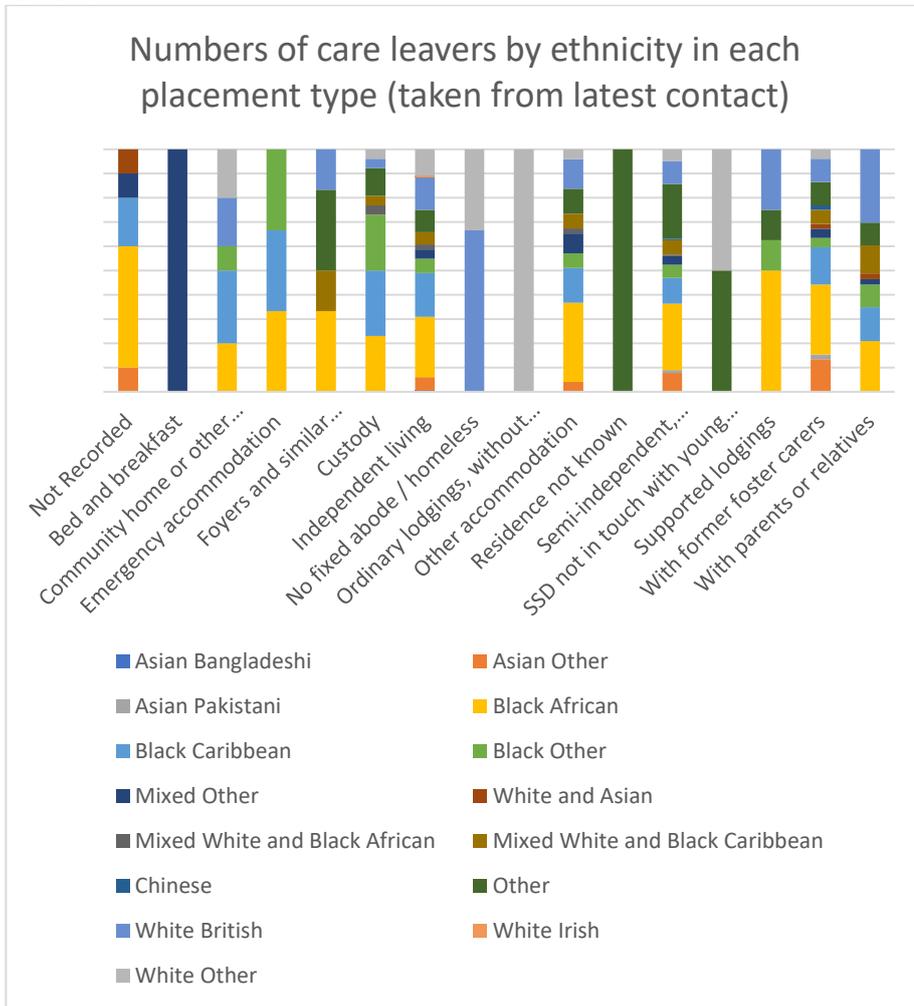
32. Chart 10 shows care leavers by gender and accommodation type based on the last contact. As above, this is not benchmarkable data and not calculated the same as the OC3. Including all care leavers aged 17+, as with children in care, males make up the larger group of SIA (70%).

Chart 10



33. Chart 11 shows care leavers by ethnicity and accommodation type based on the last contact. This is not benchmarkable data and is not calculated the same as the OC3. Please note that this includes all care leavers aged 17+. As with children in care, those in the 'Black African' (27%) and 'Other' (22%) make up the largest groups of semi-independent accommodation use.

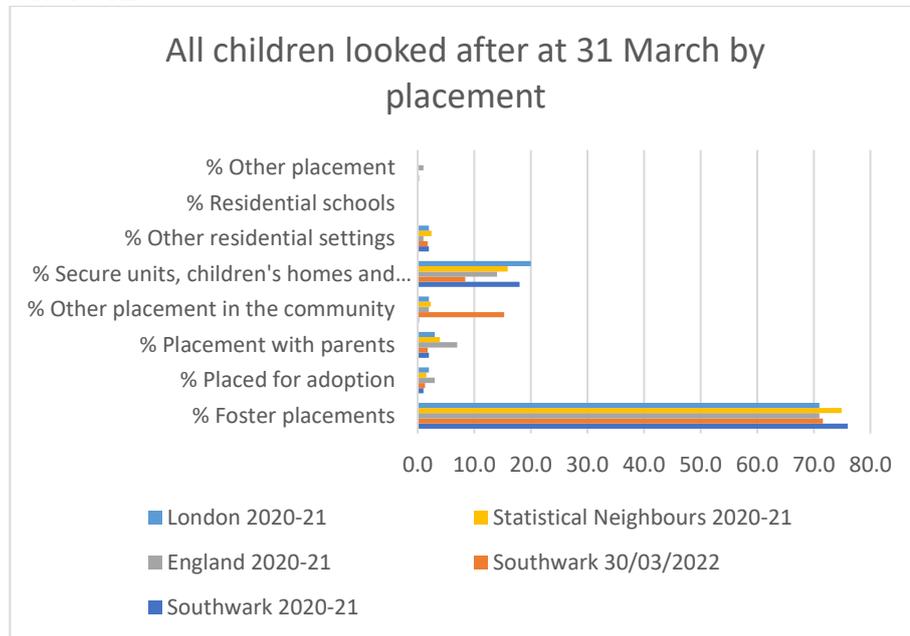
Chart 11



How do we compare with other local authorities?

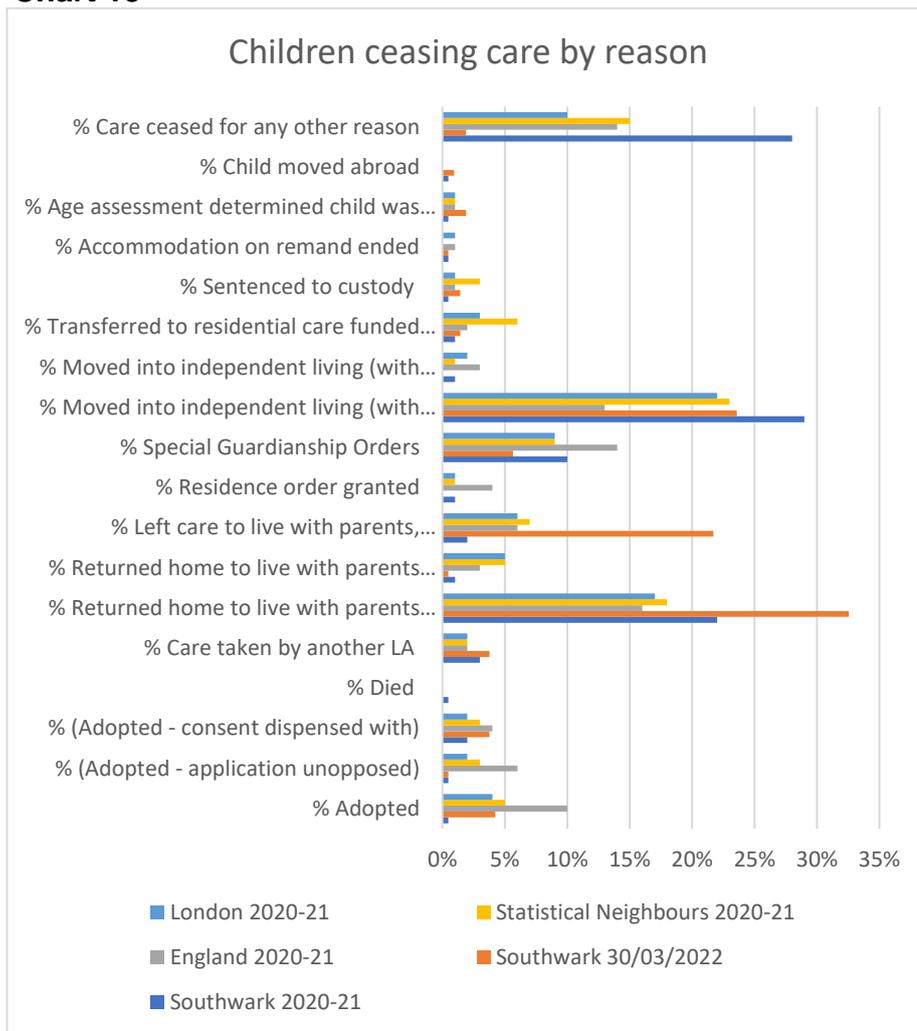
34. Chart 12 shows children in care placement types for 30 March 2022, and 31 March 2021 for the Council and comparators. This suggests our use of SIA at 30 March 2022 has increased significantly (labelled as 'other placement in the community'). This increase is largely due to the increase in UAS children, with 65% of those in 'other placement in the community' being UAS children.

Chart 12



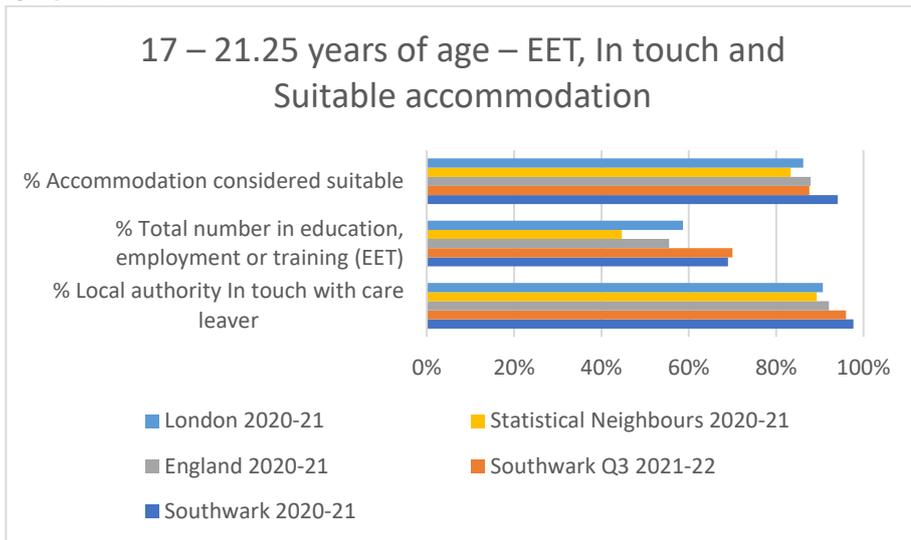
35. Chart 13 shows the reason for children ceasing to be in care for the Council during 2021/22 and 2020/21 as well as comparators for 2020/21. The highest cessation reason for the Council last year was 'moved into independent living (with supportive accommodation)' at 29%, compared to statistical neighbours at 23%. Early indication shows that this year the largest percentage are those that 'returned home to live with parents or relatives as part of care planning process' (33%). With the recent influx of UAS children this is likely to change again for performance the year 2022-23.

Chart 13



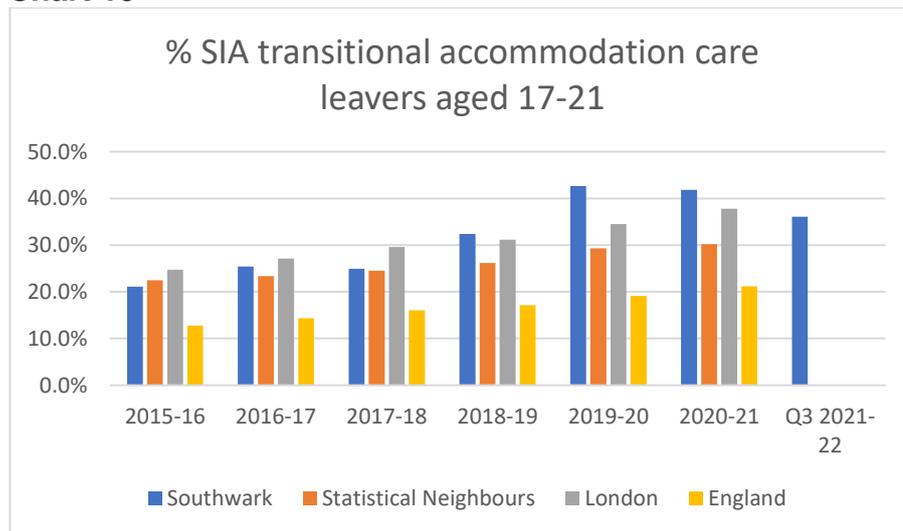
36. Chart 14 below shows key performance measures that all councils provide annually to the Department of Education (known as the OC3 outturns). It is for those aged 17-21 years. Chart 14 includes our performance in 2020/21 as well as comparators and also presented is the performance to the end quarter 3 2021/22, and. This shows the Council performs very well across all OC3 areas, above statistical neighbours, and the London and national averages.

Chart 14



37. Chart 15 below shows the use of SIA taken from the OC3 for those aged 17-21 combined for quarter 3 2021/22, and the Council and comparators for 2020/21. The graph shows that the use of SIA has increased by for all across years 2015/16 to 2019/20, at which point for Southwark figures appear to begin to decrease. Other comparators appear to remain on the increase.

Chart 15

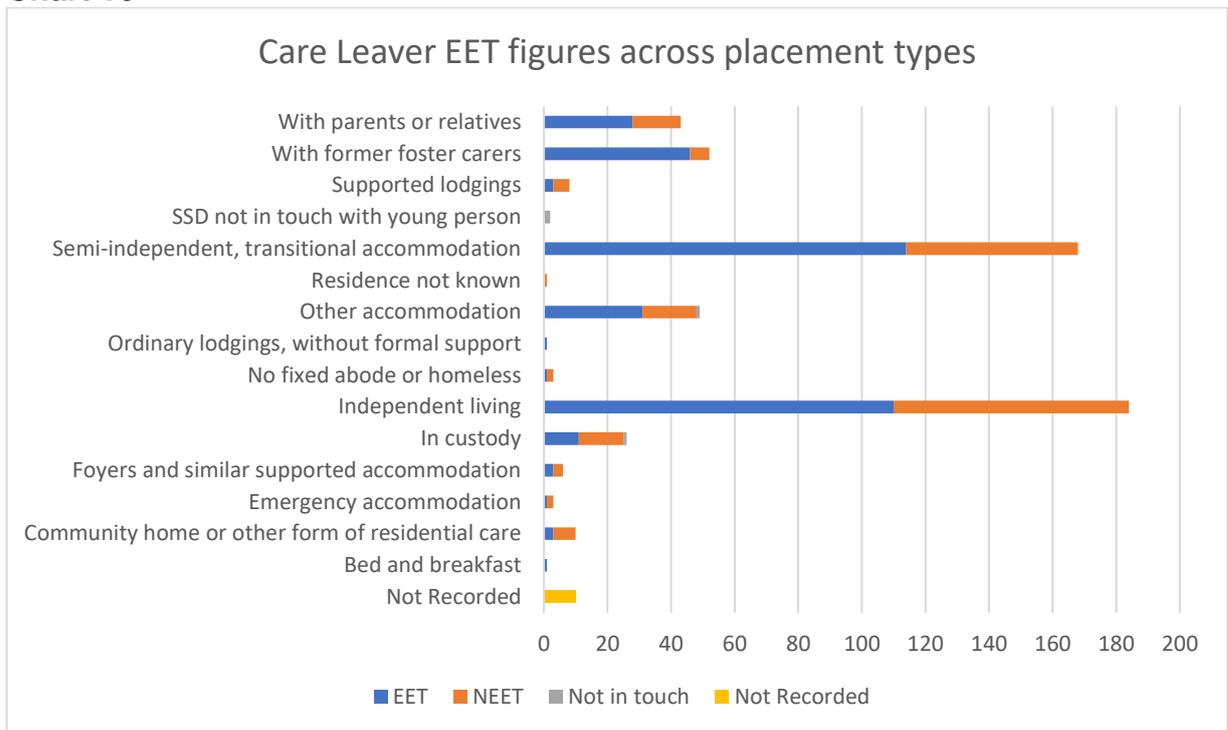


Does the type of placement for a care leaver have an impact on employment, education and training (EET)?

38. Chart 16 below shows care leaver EET status by accommodation type based on the last contact with the care leaver. This is not benchmarkable data and is not calculated the same as the OC3. This includes all care leavers aged 17+. The difference in performance for those care leavers living independently (60% EET) to those living in

SIA (68%) is nearer than one might expect, given those in SIA have more need of support.

Chart 16



Commissioned Services: the 16 Plus Support and Accommodation Services Contract

39. The Council commissions a bespoke support and accommodation service for children in care and care leavers, as well as homeless young people, provided by the Salvation Army and Oasis Housing providing good quality SIA in the borough. The 16+ Service works closely with them. There is a partnership meeting every Wednesday which monitors the number of void rooms under the contract, manages all referrals and also monitors any operational issues.
40. The main focus of late has been to improve 'move on' rates for young people from the service. Historically large numbers of young people have remained in the accommodation for many years with their only planned route out of the accommodation coming via the Council's Housing offer.
41. 'Move on' rates for care leavers have improved since new processes were introduced in the summer of 2021. This is overseen through a fortnightly 'move on' panels.
42. 'Move on' rates for young people placed in the provision via Housing due to previously being at risk of homelessness have not been as positive. The main reason is that this cohort of young people lose their right to bid on Southwark tenancies if they leave the accommodation whereas care leavers do not. Care leavers also receive financial and practical support to

access private rental properties. Another key issue is the unwillingness from some housing providers to give notice to young people that hold assured short hold tenancies.

43. In order to overcome these issues a pilot scheme has been proposed by the 16+ Children in Care and Care Leavers Service that would see the move on plans for 10 of these young people advanced and closely monitored to evidence a clear pathway for them out of the project and into private accommodation.
44. Additional support is also requested from our Housing colleagues to ensure that this cohort are provided with financial and practical assistance to enable 'move on' from the 16+ Support and Accommodation Project.

How do children in care and care leavers access SIA?

45. Referrals are made by social work teams to find suitable SIA. All referrals are quality assured by managers in the 16+ Service.
46. The first option is to always consider if the needs of the young person can be matched with the local commissioned services (Salvation Army and Oasis) as this is local in borough provision where we have much greater oversight of the quality of provision and it is local to the excellent services available for children and young people in Southwark.
47. If a young person's needs cannot be matched to the commissioned service a search is then undertaken via Care Place using the Commissioning Alliance (CA) Framework. This is the preferred option due to their quality standards framework and assurance on the quality of this provision in order to join this framework. If a match cannot be made the Access to Resources Team will approach other providers known to them after 48 hours or will undertake a dual search in an emergency.
48. There are 307 providers on the Commissioning Alliance Framework. 47 providers currently providing Semi Independent Placements to our young people.
49. The Contract Monitoring Team in Southwark undertake visits where concerns are raised about placements outside of the Commissioning Alliance (CA) Frame. The Commissioning Alliance visit where there are concerns raised about providers on their framework.
50. Southwark Young Advisors have recruited care leavers to be part of the contract monitoring and quality regime for SIA accommodation. This programme began pre-pandemic but progress was halted during the pandemic restrictions.
51. All placement offers are made on a detailed Service Provider Response Form (SPRF) setting out how the proposed SIA can meet the needs of the young person. There is management oversight to ensure the quality and

value for money of all responses. SIA provider should provide regular key working reports and demonstrate how they are supporting young people to meet the aims in their pathway plan.

52. A number of SIA placements exist close to or in Southwark including the Oasis/Salvation Army Commissioned Services.
53. Emergency and late placement requests can result in young people being placed at a distance from Southwark. Further work is underway to agree retainer beds to ensure emergency placements are obtainable within Southwark where young people have better access to the excellent services available in the borough. There is a definite need to develop more high quality local SIA.

Children aged 16 and 17 years old with care needs

54. SIA may be used as a stepping stone to independence, when this is the right option matched to the young person's needs. For many children, it's the right choice for them. Some children at 16 and 17 do not want to live with foster parents or live in a children's home and do much better in an SIA placement.
55. SIA is sometimes known as unregulated provision, that is not governed by the same type of regulation that is for foster care or children's homes. It is allowed in law when children 16 years old and over need support to live independently rather than needing full-time care. Ofsted do not currently inspect this type of provision and the Council is responsible as corporate parents to ensure the quality of this accommodation.
56. If children are 16 or 17 years old but have 'care needs' then like children under 16 they should have a regulated placement such as a foster placement or Children's Home. There is not a legal definition of what care means. It is not defined by age but is about vulnerability and the help a child needs. If a child is under constant supervision this likely to be defined as care.
57. Ofsted our regulatory inspectorate have an guide (known as Annexe A) which has a number of questions the answers to which guide if the young person needs support or care. (Appendix 1). The needs of a young person can change over time and while when moving to a placement a young person of 17 may appropriately need support, this could then change to 'care' if they become unwell and need support with medication.
58. Southwark do have a small number of children where they have care needs and are in supported SIA accommodation. In December 2021 this was 4 children (16 and 17 years old) and an audit of their cases by the Audit and Learning Team showed all 4 were making good progress and their needs were being met. While the legislation would indicate they should move to foster care or a children's home searches had not found such a provision able to meet their needs. In some cases the young people had experienced

multiple moves in foster care and residential children's homes and were doing better in supported accommodation. In some cases a move to a regulated placement would go directly against the young person's expressed wishes. There is regular senior management oversight for this cohort of young people including multi- agency oversight at the Complex Needs Panel.

Children under 16 years of age and unregulated and unregistered provision

59. In September 2021, the government made it illegal for children under 16 in to be placed in unregulated or unregistered accommodation that is SIA. Children under 16 always require a regulated placement such as a foster placement or residential placement registered with Ofsted.
60. In very exceptional circumstances when due to necessity no suitable placement can be found the Council has had no option but to place children under 16 in unregistered placements with high levels of wrap around support while urgent searches are undertaken for a placement matched to their needs. Where this happens this is with agreement from the Director for Children and Families and very regular senior management oversight for the child to move to a suitable placement as soon as possible. Appropriate notifications to Ofsted are made in these exceptional circumstances.

Proposals to introduce increased oversight on the quality of SIA

61. The government recently consulted widely on a proposal to implement national standards for unregulated provision (SIA); consultation included professionals, SIA providers and care experienced young people.
62. These reports can be found here:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/introducing-national-standards-for-unregulated-accommodation>
Introducing national standards for unregulated accommodation - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
63. As a result of the consultation it was decided that the government will:
 - implement mandatory national standards for provision that accommodates 16-and 17-year-old looked-after children and care leavers;
 - introduce requirements for providers to register and be inspected by Ofsted; and
 - call this provision 'supported accommodation for young people'.

Below are some useful links to webpages on this issue:

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/children-in-care-and-permanence/introducing-national-standards-for-unregulated->

<p>pro/supporting_documents/National%20standards%20consultation.pdf</p> <p>Introducing national standards for independent and semi-independent provision for looked-after children and care leavers aged 16 and 17 (education.gov.uk)</p>
<p>https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/looked-after-children-in-independent-or-semi-independent-placements</p> <p>Looked after children in independent or semi-independent placements - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</p>
<p>https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/introducing-national-standards-for-unregulated-accommodation</p> <p>Introducing national standards for unregulated accommodation - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</p>
<p>https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-on-national-standards-for-unregulated-provision-analytical-report</p> <p>Consultation on national standards for unregulated provision: analytical report - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</p>
<p>https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-standards-for-unregulated-provision-young-peoples-views</p> <p>National standards for unregulated provision: young people's views - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</p>

EDUCATION

Education of young people in SIA in Key Stage 5

64. Key stage 5 comprises post statutory age education 16-18, school years 12 and 13. It is during these years that children in care develop the skills to start entering their adult life.
65. Young people in SIA have a dedicated Virtual School Education Advisor. There is no distinction in the delivery of support from the Virtual School between those in SIA and foster care.
66. The Virtual School offer at Key Stage 5
 - Each young person will receive a Personal Education Plan within 10 days of entering Care.
 - Have access to Information, Advice and Guidance regarding their future education/career.

- Have advocacy and representation within school or College.
 - Support with supplementary home tuition if in Education.
 - Support returning to Education or training if NEET.
 - Access to an Education advisor to discuss any aspect of their Education or training.
 - Have attendance at college monitored.
 - Have progress at college monitored.
67. A high proportion of those young people in SIA will be UAS children studying ESOL at entry level. There will also be a number of those entering care into SIA late .eg. at 16/17 years old who will often have a history of familial disruption/difficulties and associated underachievement in school. It is not unusual for these young people to present to the Virtual School as not in EET. However, these factors should not necessarily lead to the conclusion that those in SIA underachieve academically.
68. There is evidence to suggest that those in foster care are more likely to be studying at a higher level- A' levels or L3 but this is more about the starting point of their journey in care than the outcome. Those studying at A' level are largely in stable foster placements and have been in care for longer periods, (research points to length of time in care enhancing the chances of positive academic outcomes.) Once settled in SIA and appropriately supported by a key worker we have many examples of good academic progress being made.
69. Further factors taken into consideration by the Virtual School are the levels of support our young people receive by their respective foster carers and keyworkers. We do not have supporting data to argue that eg school attendance is greater for those in foster care but we do know that generally children in foster care are likely to be more closely monitored and attendance at College open evenings/parent evenings is higher than that of keyworkers from a SIA.
70. In the Virtual School's experience attendance levels at Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings does not vary greatly between key workers and foster carers.
71. We have observed that keyworkers are generally helpful in supporting College applications and admissions.

72. EET/NEET figures for children in care in SIA

Total 16-17 year olds in SIA	NEET	EET
69	16	53

73. The current NEET figure (March 2022) for those in SIA is 30%. The March NEET figure for the whole of the KS5 cohort is approximately 15%. The above considerations apply here (those in KS5 who are new to care are often NEET on entry) as does reticence of some foster carers to take new young people who enter care but are not in education.

74. All NEET young people in SIA and foster care have a Virtual School EET Action Plan which is regularly reviewed and updated with details of support and opportunities offered. These young people are also the focus of discussion at the Virtual School KS5 weekly NEET Clinic where Education Advisors participate in a strategic forum aiming at returning this cohort to EET.

Education, employment and training (EET), 18 years old plus, for care leavers in SIA

75. The 18+ Careers Team provides an accessible service to care leavers from the age of 18 – 25 and over. The young people who fall in this cohort comprise a mixture of young people in education, employment and training (EET), along with others not in EET for varying reasons.

76. Working alongside social workers, personal advisors and key workers for young people in semi-independent placements, the 18+ Careers Team supports transition to adulthood through the promotion of EET. As young people move closer to independence, barriers to EET and young people's self-determination and right to choose, become more apparent. This is seen in the increase in young people listed as NEET (not in education, employment or training) as the age range goes up.

77. The 16+ Service has a strong focus on counteracting the NEET figures with bi-monthly NEET panels, 1:1 NEET consultations with allocated workers and a weekly EET Drop-in provision. We also work in partnership with our DWP colleagues across the pan-borough Southwark Job Centre Plus offices to address benefit issues and promote entry to employment.

78. One of the barriers highlighted by our DWP colleagues that focuses on our young people in semi-independent accommodation, is the high charge of placements that includes additional costs such as key work hours on the Licence Agreement used to apply for the Housing Element of Universal Credit. This then affects the amount of Personal Allowance received on Universal Credit with the Personal Allowance being reduced as payment of rent to the landlord is prioritised. In preparing a young person for independence, this does not support their financial management skills and negatively affects those looking for employment at entry level.

HEALTH

79. Within the Children Looked After (CLA) Health Team effective plans are in place to ensure all children in care aged 16 and 17 years old are supported with their health needs to ensure a smooth transition to adulthood and continue to receive the advice and health services they need; this includes contributing to the move from CAMHS specialist service Carelink to adult mental health services. This involves early planning to promote and ensure the transition to adult health services is appropriate, timely and the young person is clear about all expectations and plans for their health needs to be met.
80. All children in care have access to a care leaver health summary/passport at the time of their last health assessment before the young person turns 18 years of age to enable them to be equipped to manage their own health needs including providing advice and signposting to dentistry and sexual health services wherever possible. However, the team also continue to provide enhanced health appointments to a care leaver to support with any health issues on their requests. This also includes contributing to placement moves when the young person enters SIA to give guidance and support to social care around assurance that any identified health needs will continue to be supported and met.
81. For all young people in care including care leavers within the youth justice and prison system contacts are made to health teams within these secure estates settings to gain assurance that all previously identified health needs are being met and any newly identified conditions are updated on their local health care records. This includes any planned discharges both back to Southwark and for young people who are being placed out of borough into semi-independent accommodation or other place of residence where there are identified health needs. This has included effective liaison with all health care professionals both in the acute and community settings across Boroughs/areas to make sure placement moves are as streamlined as possible to not cause any delays in responding to and supporting all aspects of their health needs.
82. The Designated Doctor and Nurse in the CCG and named professionals in the Health CLA Provider service continue to lead in Health both through a strategic and operational lens to gain assurance that they are safeguarded and that care leavers increased vulnerabilities wherever they are resident and as they transition into adult health services and independence are appropriately recognised and addressed to improve their health outcomes. This has included:
 - Raising awareness within primary care to promote and support extended appointment times for care leavers.
 - Leading on case for change for free prescriptions for care leavers.

- Attending Social Prescribers forums to raise awareness of the needs of care leavers as they transition to adult services.
- An offer of training for semi-independent accommodation providers to raise awareness of health needs.
- Acting as an advocate in raising awareness in care pathways in services around the vulnerabilities in transitioning to adult health services including mental health services.
- Currently 107 of our children in care have an EHC Plan whilst 58 also have a learning disability/difficulty, the health team and designated professionals attend Care Education and Treatment Review's to reduce admissions to hospital settings and/or facilitate appropriate discharge from hospital and contribute to reducing any risk of any placement breakdown.
- Attend panels including, MAPPA, MARAC, MACE, Extra-Familial Harm, Complex Case Panel and Channel Panel for interconnectivity and synergy around safeguarding, and wider increased vulnerabilities for care leavers.

MENTAL HEALTH

Clinical Service support for care leavers in SIA

83. The Council's in-house Clinical Service provides direct and indirect ("working via the system") support to care leavers who live in SIA.

Indirect Support

84. There are currently three clinical practitioners linked to care leaver teams. Allocated social workers and personal advisors can consult with these clinical practitioners throughout the week to discuss any concerns they have about care leaver's mental health and wellbeing.

Common themes of requests include:

- Reflecting on and addressing difficulties in engaging care leavers.
- Hypothesising factors that are getting in the way of achieving agreed goals.
- Planning social work interventions including preparing for challenging conversations.
- Thinking about impact/ need for measures that may involve deprivation of liberty.

- Exploring issues impacting on capacity and consent, including assessment of adaptive and cognitive functioning.
85. Clinical practitioners also attend the regular team practice supervisions and facilitate reflective discussions about care leavers living in semi-independent accommodation. Recent themes/ topics of discussion have included:
- Exploring social and cultural factors impacting on mental health / relationship functioning.
 - Exploring impact of challenging situations on staff and considering support options.
 - Discussion of risk assessment and support planning.
86. Clinical practitioners have also provided support to care providers/ semi-independent accommodation staff. In recent months this has included:
- Supporting staff to understand and respond to risk issues such as self-harming and suicidality.
 - Assisting staff to create tailored emotional and behaviour support guidance documents.
87. Running reflective practice groups for staff working with young people who are presenting with complex and distressing difficulties.
88. Several panels that relate to planning and decision making for care leavers in semi-independent accommodation are attended by Clinical Practitioners and the Clinical Service Manager, including Complex Cases Panel, Missing Panel, and eighteen plus residential panel.

Direct Support

89. The Clinical Service has some capacity to provide direct support interventions to young people. The majority of care leavers that the Clinical Service is working with are in SIA and are mostly over 18 years old. Over the last year this has typically been due to young people being on long waiting lists for support from local NHS services, or where young people have identified mental health needs but are currently declining to attend NHS mental health services.
90. There is a fairly even representation of male and female care leavers being supported by the Clinical Service. Several themes and differences were noted for these services users:
91. Female Care Leavers: Common presenting issues and support needs include risk issues related to self-harm and suicidal ideation in the context of difficulties with emotional regulation and response to trauma. Several of

these young women were also viewed as at risk of exploitation. Most of the female care leavers had had some sort of mental health support/ service use in the past but were waiting for NHS services. The clinical service provides an “in between” support service, often focused on developing emotional regulation skills and strategies and preparing clients for more specialised NHS based services (eg. Early Intervention Psychosis, Recovery Team, and Personality Disorder Service).

92. **Male Care Leavers:** Among male clients, presenting issues were observed to more often be related to concerns that placements were at risk of breaking down, often due to them being viewed as having anger-management and anti-social behavioural difficulties. Other notable presentations were depression and PTSD. Several male unaccompanied asylum seekers have received direct therapeutic support from the clinical service, including work focusing on trauma (including use of EMDR) and depression.
93. Most of the direct work is being provided in person, with clinical practitioners travelling to meet clients. Some clinical work remains online where clients have stated this is a preference and where there is agreement that this is likely to support progress. The clinical practitioners take an active role in supporting attendance of appointments with NHS services, offering to travel with young people and advocating for services to make adaptations (eg. not discharging if appointments are missed). They have been actively involved in the council wide, It Takes A Village- Multiple Disadvantages project, helping to ensure that care leavers are a part of this.

Challenges for working with care leavers in SIA

94. A key challenge for supporting young people who are over eighteen, wherever they are accommodated, is consent. Where a young person has the capacity to consent to treatment and support we have to respect this. It can be challenging to balance the need to respect independence and autonomy with duty of care and safeguarding. We attempt to meet this challenge by supporting reflective and flexible practice that engages young people, is based on collaboratively agreed goals, and communicates our care and wishes for their best interests. This can indeed be very challenging as many of our young people have felt let down by past relationships and can be understandably mistrustful of new relationships. A related challenge is that even when there is agreement and consent about the usefulness of accessing services, our young people can struggle to attend regularly and may require additional flexibility and support from services.
95. A number of care leavers in SIA live outside of Southwark and it can be a challenge to engage them in local services. The clinical service has some capacity to visit young people and to provide virtual meetings. Our sense is that there is demand for further support and this could be better met by additional capacity in the clinical service.

Carelink – mental health support and intervention through the NHS

96. Carelink is a multi-disciplinary NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health service (CAMHS) supporting the mental health and emotional wellbeing of children in care, predominantly up until the age of 18 years old. It is a ring-fenced service with joint funding from the CCG and council. It is able to:
- provide comprehensive multidisciplinary assessments to aid understanding of children's complex emotional and mental health needs.
 - use an outreach model to engage children in care and where appropriate to provide evidence based interventions.
 - work with the network to support understanding of the impact of mental health and emotional problems on a young person and to support carers to respond to those in the most helpful way.
 - support referrals to other NHS services, both CAMHS and Adult
97. Carelink works with under 18 year olds living in SIA where the young person is in travelling distance of CAMHS Carelink. It does as follows:
- Assessment including specialist assessments.
 - Evidence based treatments, including via outreach models.
 - Risk assessment and risk planning.
 - Consultation and liaison with the social worker and professional network supporting young people in SIA.
 - Contributing to post 18 planning for mental health support, including referral to specialist and adult mental health teams.
98. Carelink work with under 18s living in SIA where young person is not in travelling distance of CAMHS Carelink:
- Where a young person is previously known to Carelink CAMHS support to the social work team in helping the provision understand a young person's mental health and other needs.
 - Where appropriate Carelink can support the social work team to make a referral to local CAMHS.
 - Support and consultation with risk planning.
 - Consultation and liaison with the social worker and professional network working with young people in SIA.

- Contributing to post 18 planning for mental health support, including referral to specialist and adult mental health teams.
 - Occasional visits to young people placed out of area, with the social worker to contribute to care planning and access to therapeutic support.
99. The challenges for Carelink and CAMHS supporting under 18s living in SIA are where a young person is prescribed medication and there is a need for support in managing medication, for example where a young person may be at higher risk if they manage their own medication, this presents a challenge. This is because staff in SIA cannot hold responsibility for dispensing medication.

Southwark Youth Justice Service (YJS) working with Southwark children in care in SIA

100. Southwark YJS currently works with approximately 130 young people. At any one time, between 10- 20 of these young people may be children in care of whom between 5-12 may be resident in SIA, usually living outside Southwark.
101. If a child is living outside the borough, the local YJS will normally manage and supervise their court order. However Southwark YJS do provide a “care taking” officer who is the young person’s Southwark point of contact. The Southwark YJ officer’s role becomes very important if the young person moves placement to another borough, or if the child is likely to return to living in Southwark at any point.
102. Key Southwark Youth Justice Responsibilities:
- To liaise effectively with the host YJS and ensure that YJS planning for the young person is fully coordinated.
 - To liaise with the allocated social worker about the young person’s welfare and future plans.
 - If the young person is assessed as presenting significant risk to others, risk managing the young person through the multiagency Risk Management panel.
 - If the young person is detained in youth detention custody, working with the care department and the Access to Resources Team to identify a suitable SIA placement for their eventual release, ensuring this accommodation is available 2 weeks prior to the release date.
 - Liaising with the prospective host borough so that they are aware the young person will be living in their borough and so ensuring that a host YJS officer is promptly allocated to manage the young person’s case

- Liaising with education colleagues to ensure suitable ETE provision is in place near the SIA following the young person's release.
 - Liaising with custody staff about the overall resettlement plan for the young person.
103. There is a really positive working together relationship between 16+ Children in Care and Care Leaver Services and the Youth Justice Service with:
- I. Good collaboration and communication occurring between Southwark care and YJS staff, both at operational and managerial levels.
 - II. Good staff awareness of the specific needs of many looked after children- eg trauma ,bereavement, lack of family and physical stability.
 - III. Ensuring the quality of YJS service provided to young people living in SIA is the same as that provided to young people living with their parents in Southwark.

The role of Quality Assurance and the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)

104. Every child in care must have an IRO. Their role is to oversee and scrutinise the care plan of the child and ensure that everyone who is involved in that child's life fulfils their responsibilities. The IRO chairs regular looked after children reviews, during these reviews they will ensure the child has a suitable place to live whilst they are looked after and that plans are made to support them with their housing once they become a care leaver. The IRO oversees the implementation of the pathway plan until a young person leaves care or until their 18th birthday. Once they turn 18 the allocated social worker or personal advisor oversees the pathway planning.
105. It is essential that all children in care understand their rights and entitlements and how to make a complaint. Southwark employ a Children's Rights Officer (CRO) who ensures that children and young people's voices are heard, they facilitate the children in care council (Speakerbox) and make sure that children and young people are involved in shaping how Southwark deliver services. Speakerbox consists of young people under the age of 18 as well as care leavers up to the age of 25. It is an active children in care council and they meet monthly and participate in activities outside of the Speakerbox meetings. Careleavers are regularly involved in interviewing candidates applying for all levels of positions across Children's Services, deliver training to the social work teams and provide input into the design of the forms and workflows the social work teams use. The CRO provides advocacy for children and young people when required and Southwark also have a contract with Coram Voice who provide a formal advocacy service for children and young people.

Learning from audit

106. In September 2021, the pathway plans of young people aged 17-20 in SIA were examined to gain a sense of their views about SIA. The themes reflected a range of views including in relation to:
- i. Some young people wanting to live in quite specific areas – including areas in Southwark and areas outside Southwark (and outside south London). Related to this is how safe different young people feel in different areas, with quite a high proportion saying they would not feel safe if living in specific local areas or having aspirations to a different lifestyle. This included comments about not wanting to live with other care leavers or (for one young person) wanting to live in a more rural, “white” locations.
 - ii. Views about the standard of the accommodation were variable with some young people being very happy with the standard of their accommodation and others less so. Particular cases where concerns were identified were escalated for management attention.
 - iii. Some young people appreciated assistance from staff and others found staff oversight of their placements as intrusive, and wanted to live on their own.
 - iv. The wait time involved with moving somewhere and the wait to obtain a more secure tenancy caused frustration for some. There were also some young people worried about taking on private rented tenancies, fearing they would not be able to pay the rent if they started working.
107. Step-Up to Social Work students are currently undertaking consultation with young people in SIA which, it is hoped, will provide an updated sense of young people’s views about their accommodation.
108. Audits in November 2021 focused specifically on young people in SIA. These cases evidenced good work by personal advisors and social workers and young people’s voices being captured in their pathway plans. There was (as in October 2021) a need identified to ensure that key documents were on case files and to better evidence the expectations in relation to commissioned services on young people’s case files. A new placement planning meeting agenda has since been provided for this type of accommodation to help ensure meetings are clear who (the young person, the placement provider or the social worker/personal advisor) is doing what to advance the young person’s pathway to more independent living. This template will be incorporated into a MOSAIC form which is currently under development. The audits also identified a need to ensure that files were clear about not just how identified shortfalls in young people’s accommodation had been followed up (about which there was good evidence), but also how they had been resolved (about which there was less evidence).

109. In December 2021, the files of four young people with care needs in SIA were examined in greater depth. Young people with care needs should be placed in regulated accommodation (Children's Homes) and not in SIA, so evidence about how these young people's care needs were being met was needed. The audits found that, in short, all four of the young people appeared to be making good progress (particularly when compared to the problems they had been having in their previous accommodation) and generally it appeared their needs were met, but as above more evidence from the placement providers was needed to confirm this. There was good evidence of multi-agency working on these case files. Access to education and training was problematic for this group, and while young people's mental health was receiving a good level of attention, two young people needed follow up around their physical health needs.
110. Audits in January 2022 focused on education, employment and training. While there was not specific reference to SIA, it was notable that half of the young people who were in EET were in or had been in Staying Put placements, and that young people who were in work and considering moving on from SIA to private rented accommodation needed support (as in some cases did their personal advisors) with understanding the financial implications of this move, namely advice on how much less disposable income they would have and how they would manage this. In April 2022 we are auditing cases of young people in private rented accommodation, which it is hoped will provide further learning around this.
111. Audits in February 2022 focused on UAS young people. These audits were generally positive about young people's accommodation (which for 5 out of 6 was SIA). The audits showed that young people's participation and engagement with services was good, their identities, their ethnicity and culture were supported and the impact and outcomes from the services they had received were good.

Moving on from SIA

112. The current Housing Allocations Policy means that all Southwark care leavers get band 2 priority nomination for a studio flat in Southwark if single, or proportionate number of rooms if have children.
113. There are currently 125 care leavers on the waiting list for a secure tenancy.
114. For the dates April 2021 – 31 March 2022. 864 days is the average wait for a studio flat if you are in Band 2. Housing have advised that this wait time is continuing to increase in length.
115. Due to the long waits for social housing and high cost and unsustainability of remaining in SIA young people are now supported to move to privately rented accommodation while retaining their Band 2 Status.

116. **Local housing Allowance (LHA)** rates are based on private market rents being paid by tenants. What impacts the rate a young person may receive is based on:

- I. Location; inner London rates Vs outside of London.
- II. Number of bedrooms at the property.
- III. Number of people within the household

117. The **shared room rate** under LHA rules, single people aged under 35 with no children, who are living in private rented accommodation, are normally assumed to be living in shared accommodation. This means the maximum amount of rent that can be used in their Housing Benefit or Universal Credit calculation is based on the cost of renting a room in a shared house or flat in their area even if they live in a self-contained property.

118. The **one bed rate (self-contained)** under LHA rules, to qualify for a higher LHA rate you would need to fall in the below categories:

- living with your partner
- a care leaver under 25
- lived in a hostel or refuge for at least 3 months
- get disability benefits but do not need overnight care
- a former prisoner covered by MAPPA aged 25-34.

119. A young person will still be eligible for the rate; even if they live in shared housing.

The benefit cap

120. This is a limit on the total amount of benefit you can get. It applies to most people aged 16 or over who have not reached State Pension age. A young person claiming benefits for the first time will usually receive a 9 months grace period before the benefits cap come into place.

121. It should be a key driver and focus to support young people to move into independent living; under the age of 25, whilst they are still eligible for the higher LHA rate, which gives them a wider option of affordable housing and private rental market.

Policy framework implications

122. The Borough Plan has a commitment to *“give young people in our borough the best opportunities in life”*. This commitment has particular relevance to children in care and Care Leavers.

Community, equalities (including socio-economic) and health impacts

Community impact statement

123. Many children in care come into care when sadly their families who are local residents cannot safely care for them and they are already part of the diverse Southwark communities. As highlighted in the report to March Corporate Parenting Committee some children come into care as unaccompanied asylum seeking children from a variety of countries.

Equalities (including socio-economic) impact statement

124. The Council is committed to providing fair and just services, addressing inequality. The welcome and provision of services to unaccompanied asylum seeking children is an important way the Council and its partners demonstrates their commitment these principles.

Climate change implications

125. There are no climate change implications to consider in this report.

Resource implications and Financial implications

126. Over the last 5 years there has been significant pressure on the SIA budget with regular overspends of £1m year on year since 2017/18 that have been contained within the spend of the Children and Adults Department. Over the last five years growth money has been allocated to this service. In 2017/18 the total gross budget for placements was £3.4m and this has been increased to £8.2m. in 2021/22.

127. During 2021/22 there has been focus was on reducing costs with 3 bespoke financial panels for 16-18, 18+ and 21+ and the panels increased from monthly to two weekly targeting areas of young people remaining in accommodation funded by the Council and moving those young people that are ready to pre tenancy or private landlord accommodation offering one month's rent and deposit as an incentive and looking at high cost SIA accommodation.

128. Generally this has been successful and there has been a reduction of £800k on costs for young people age 16-18 (non USAC) and £337.7k for young people 18+ between 2020/21 and 2021/22.

Consultation

129. There has been no formal consultation in the preparation of this report. It is planned that some young people with experience of SIA will be able to share some of their experiences with corporate parenting committee on 20 April 2022.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Documents	Held At	
Public Sector Equalities Duty - Equalities Act 2010	Children In Care and Careleavers Children and Families Directorate Southwark Council 7, Talfourd Place London, SE15 5NW	Andrew Fowler 0207 525 0179
Link: https://www.southwark.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/equality-and-diversity/public-sector-equality-duty		
Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012	Children In Care and Careleavers Children and Families Directorate Southwark Council 7, Talfourd Place London, SE15 5NW	Andrew Fowler 0207 525 0179
Link: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/3/enacted		
Southwark's Borough Plan	Children In Care and Careleavers Children and Families Directorate Southwark Council 7, Talfourd Place London, SE15 5NW	Andrew Fowler 0207 525 0179
Link: https://www.southwark.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/fairer-future/council-plan		
Introducing national standards for independent and semi-independent provision for looked-after children and care leavers aged 16 and 17 (education.gov.uk)	Children In Care and Careleavers Children and Families Directorate Southwark Council 7, Talfourd Place London, SE15 5NW	Andrew Fowler 0207 525 0179
Link: https://consult.education.gov.uk/children-in-care-and-permanence/introducing-national-standards-for-unregulated-pro/supporting_documents/National%20standards%20consultation.pdf		

Background Documents	Held At	
<p>Looked after children in independent or semi-independent placements - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</p>	<p>Children In Care and Careleavers Children and Families Directorate Southwark Council 7, Talfourd Place London, SE15 5NW</p>	<p>Andrew Fowler 0207 525 0179</p>
<p>Link: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/looked-after-children-in-independent-or-semi-independent-placements</p>		
<p>Introducing national standards for unregulated accommodation - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</p>	<p>Children In Care and Careleavers Children and Families Directorate Southwark Council 7, Talfourd Place London, SE15 5NW</p>	<p>Andrew Fowler 0207 525 0179</p>
<p>Link: https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/introducing-national-standards-for-unregulated-accommodation</p>		
<p>Consultation on national standards for unregulated provision: analytical report - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</p>	<p>Children In Care and Careleavers Children and Families Directorate Southwark Council 7, Talfourd Place London, SE15 5NW</p>	<p>Andrew Fowler 0207 525 0179</p>
<p>Link: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-on-national-standards-for-unregulated-provision-analytical-report</p>		
<p>National standards for unregulated provision: young people's views - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</p>	<p>Children In Care and Careleavers Children and Families Directorate Southwark Council 7, Talfourd Place London, SE15 5NW</p>	<p>Andrew Fowler 0207 525 0179</p>
<p>Link: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-standards-for-unregulated-provision-young-peoples-views</p>		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Supported Accommodation

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	David Quirke-Thornton, Strategic Director of Children's and Adults' Services	
Report Author	Andrew Fowler, Head of Service, Children in Care and Care Leavers (16+)	
Version	Final	
Dated	7 April 2022	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Director of Law and Governance	No	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	No	No
List other officers here	N/a	N/a
Cabinet Member	No	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team		7 April 2022