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**Baroness Bennett**

**House of Lords**

23 June 2025

Dear Natalie

I am writing in response to a question you raised in our discussion on Staying close, Clause 7, in committee last week.

I wanted to respond to your concerns over the number of 17-year-olds turning 18 being in unregulated or independent accommodation and the support available to them.

Provision now known as Supported Accommodation was previously unregulated. Following increasing concern about the quality of support and accommodation in “unregulated” independent and semi-independent accommodation, the previous government embarked on a programme of reforms. This included the introduction of The Supported Accommodation (England) Regulations 2023 which set out national standards to be met by Supported Accommodation providers, regulated by Ofsted.

These regulations came into effect in October 2023, with all providers of Supported Accommodation now required to be registered with Ofsted and meet the Supported Accommodation standards to operate legally. Transition to adulthood for looked after children should not just start on their 16th birthday; preparation for a time when they will no longer be looked after should be integral to the care planning process throughout their time in care.

Local authorities should review, with the young person, whether leaving care at 16 is the right choice for them. A move to supported or independent accommodation should only be a consideration where 16- and 17-year-olds are ready for a greater level of independence. Those not yet ready, or those in need of additional support, should remain in foster care or children’s homes.



The 1989 Act requires the preparation of a pathway plan for all young people as they prepare to leave care. The plan should be based on the individual's care plan and set out the actions that must be taken by the responsible authority, the young person, their parents, their carers and the full range of agencies, so that each young person is provided with the services they need to enable them to achieve their aspirations and make a successful transition to adulthood.

This plan must remain a "live document" and be reviewed regularly to ensure the young people have all the support they require.

Where the local authority is considering ceasing to look after a child aged 16 or 17 years, such a decision cannot be put into effect until it has been approved either by a nominated officer or the Director of Children's Services. The person approving the decision needs to be satisfied that ceasing to look after the child will safeguard and promote the welfare of the child as set out in the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010.

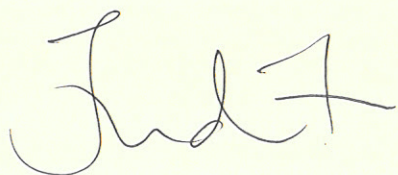
While many children in care continue to live in foster care or children's homes, councils can place 16–17-year-old in registered supported accommodation where this is appropriate for the child. A move to supported accommodation does not mean the young person ceases to be looked after, they can remain in the care of the local authority.

The aim of supported accommodation is to support young people to develop their independence in preparation for adult living while keeping them safe in a homely and nurturing environment.

We know transition to adulthood is often a turbulent time and care leavers should expect the same level of care and support that others would expect from their family. Local authorities should make sure that they are provided with the opportunities they need, which will include offering them more than one chance as they grapple with taking on the responsibilities of adulthood.

Thank you again for taking the time to engage on these matters. I hope these further details have been useful and I will place a copy in the House libraries.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julia', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**BARONESS BLAKE OF LEEDS, CBE**