Case Study Learning Example:
Sunderland – a local authority registering as a supported accommodation provider

UNITED FOR A BETTER CHILDHOOD

Learning Example: Sunderland

Can you give us some background about Sunderland as a local authority?

We started off with one supported accommodation provision many years ago, it was so successful that we developed more. We now have four supported accommodation settings.

We have also always operated our own supported lodgings scheme. We currently have six host families and three other families who are about to undergo assessment.

How have you decided to register your different provisions?

We registered under two separate registrations, one registration for our supported accommodation settings and one registration for our supported lodgings scheme

Our four supported accommodation settings are registered as Category 3: Shared accommodation (non-ring-fenced)

This means these settings are not for the exclusive use of cared for children or care experienced young people. We wanted to ensure we could also provide quality homes for homeless 16–17-year-olds (under S17 or S20 of the Children Act) and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, who transferred to us through the NTS.

Our supported lodgings setting is registered as Category 4: Supported Lodgings.

How did you decide who would take on the roles of Registered Service Manager and Nominated Individual?

We already had one manager overseeing the supported lodgings setting and one overseeing the supported accommodation settings, so they naturally became our Registered Service Managers (RSM). I've taken on the role of Nominated Individual for both registrations.

In our service, the RSM for our supported lodgings has an additional role around providing advice and guidance around homeless 16-17-year-olds to the wider service. We've merged the role because the RSM and her team have expert knowledge in that area.

How did you prepare for registration?

We didn't have to make a huge number of changes, but we needed to undertake some additional tasks like location risk assessments. This was relatively easy because we had a model of good practice that we could replicate from our children's homes.

Another area we had to consider was our processes for reporting and notifying serious events to Ofsted. We already do that in our children's home settings, so there were documents and templates that we amended to make fit for purpose.

How did you decide as a local authority that it was the right decision to register as a provider for your supported lodgings service?

Having our supported lodgings registered as one supported accommodation service with our RSM overseeing means we can offer consistent and robust support in terms of supervision and training.

Registering our supported lodgings sits us within regulated services and therefore I'd hope will gives us some assurance around the quality of our hosts and the quality of assessments.

It also means that when difficulties arise in delivering this service, there is a strong relationship with the hosts.

It's not only relationships between hosts and young people, but also all our professional relationships that help to support young people and keep them safe.

For young people with more complex needs, supported accommodation comes with an element of risk. So, making sure our matching processes are thorough and that we have a good understanding of risk is important. It is helpful to have one registration that you take responsibility for.

What about the staff who work in your supported accommodation settings?

The supported accommodation we provide is staffed, whereas the supported lodgings is a family-based setting. The RSMs for these two registrations will work closely together to share good practice and advice about things they share in common like how to write a location risk assessment, or what quality of support reviews might look like.

We mostly recruit staff who have experience of working in children's homes, so they understand what it means to work within a regulatory framework and weren't concerned about the registration.

There is additional work that we are asking of supported lodgings hosts, for example we're now asking them to keep support plans for young people and a daily log of what is happening in the home to provide evidence of support being offered to young people.

As part of our preparation, we have developed a good training offer and support for them to offset the additional tasks being asked of themWe did wonder whether we would lose some of our hosts because of the changes due to regulation, but that didn't happen.

Could you tell us about the support and training offer for staff and hosts?

We offer the same training for staff who work in our supported accommodation settings as in our children's homes. We have mandatory training for specific areas including safeguarding, health and safety, and therapeutic crisis intervention etc.

For our supported lodgings hosts, this is more closely aligned to the training offer for foster carers. We have bought licenses for an online training platform, and we have highlighted key areas that we would like them to focus on, for example: safeguarding, equality and diversity. We will build and expand on this offer over time.

What about your policy regarding restraint?

This is something we questioned during the consultation period on the proposed regulations.

In our supported accommodation settings and supported lodgings, staff and hosts are often lone working. We would not expect any kind of physical intervention of young people. We've been clear in our policies that supported lodgings hosts will not be trained in restraint practices, and we wouldn't be placing young people that carry that level of risk in supported lodgings.

We are training our staff within the supported accommodation settings in therapeutic crisis intervention to make sure that they've got the de-escalation skills to keep everyone safe.

Did you have any issues throughout the registration process?

The uploading of key documents when registering was problematic. For example, the online portal would only allow us to upload one Statement of Purpose for the supported accommodation settings but we had four!

Throughout the process, the regional inspection manager for our region and the inspector allocated to oversee our registrations were both extremely helpful and recognised that this was an issue. They told us to only upload one document and said they would follow up if needed.

We also hadn't anticipated that Ofsted would ask to see our staff recruitment records. We showed them what we had and explained our processes and they accepted this. After this, we developed a checklist which outlines what inspectors want to see and pulled all of the documents set out in the schedule into one place to support us with this ahead of inspection visits

What documents/evidence did your supported lodgings hosts need?

We showed our assessments of the hosts and their enhanced with barred list DBS check and references. We did need to update some of these to make sure they were in line with Ofsted and will use the online update service moving forward.

We also needed to evidence gas and electrical safety certificates for hosts homes.

How has Sunderland used the additional burdens funding from the DfE?

We are still having conversations about how we might like to use it, but one example will be to fund the additional training licenses for our supported lodging hosts and train some of our supported accommodation staff to be Therapeutic Crisis Intervention Trainers to ensure ongoing training of the teams.

Tell us about your location risk assessments?

We will need to complete an individual location risk assessment for each supported lodgings host and accommodation setting, as these are not clustered in specific areas.

We hadn't finished all of the location risk assessments for our supported lodgings hosts when we applied for registration but we were clear with our inspector that we were planning to.

We'll model them on the assessments we do for children's homes, describing the location of the home and then any obvious risks, for example if it was near a railway line and the local crime data.

We will also include consultation with the neighbourhood policing team, and we have asked our ward councillors a couple of key questions about any community knowledge that they feel we should include. Our MSET lead will support with information regarding any hotspots of concern.

How has this area been affected by current challenges in the sector?

Capacity is an issue for us across every aspect of accommodation that we deliver from fostering to children's homes and into supported accommodation.

This sufficiency issue is not helped by the influx of young people coming through the National Transfer Scheme and also by the cost-of-living crisis.

For example, we have some young people who might currently live in supported accommodation, who we think are tenancy ready but they still can't afford to move on and live independently because of how expensive it is to rent privately.

How have you worked with other teams in the service?

Previously we had referral documents for any requests for homes for children and young people. This document was completed by the social worker and then sent to our commissioning team, who would search for a home

We've worked together to separate this process, so we now have a specific referral system for supported accommodation. We've changed this because it can be difficult for social workers to understand the difference between care and support. We've developed some key questions that will support practitioners to consider the young person's needs.

The questions asked within the referral document will help us to decide whether a young person is ready for supported accommodation, and also means we will have an understanding of their needs before they move to a semi-independent setting. It can help the relationship between providers and the local authority too, because we're better evidencing that we understand what individual children and young people might need and providing the providers with the information to think about managing risk, matching, and developing support plans.