

# Home from Home

developments in supported lodgings  
provision for young people

**Report of the conference  
28 April 2009  
London**

the fostering network  
the voice of foster care



## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 More than 150 people gathered at a London conference centre on 28 April 2009 to discuss developments in delivering supported lodgings services and to learn from each others' experience. Delegates came from a wide range of voluntary, local authority and central government organisations, and included policy-makers, commissioners of services, managers of services and people who offer their homes as supported lodgings for vulnerable young people.
- 1.2 The conference drew together two parallel Government policy agendas:
- the Communities and Local Government agenda, launched in late 2006, to eliminate the use by local housing authorities of temporary bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless 16 and 17-year-olds (except in an emergency and then for no more than four weeks)
  - the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) agenda to provide more sustained and consistent transitions from local authority care to independent adulthood for children and young people aged 16-21 who have been in care, ongoing since the introduction of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and reinforced through the Children and Young Persons Act 2008.
- 1.3 Communities and Local Government in 2007 identified supported lodgings as a valuable option for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and included relevant advice to local authorities on its National Youth Homelessness Scheme website, launched in 2007<sup>1</sup>. Specialist Advisers for CLG found, however, that provision of supported lodgings locally was very variable in terms of prevalence and objectives. In 2008 the Department commissioned an in-depth report into practice and outcomes in supported lodgings<sup>2</sup>, primarily considering those services which are accessible to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Communities and Local Government Ministers are keen to see a national network established of supported lodgings services for such young people and sponsored a conference in October 2008 to launch the *Making a Difference* report and to facilitate sharing experience between established and developing supported lodgings services.
- 1.4 Over a similar period, the Fostering Network and the National Care Advisory Service (NCAS) had become aware of the increasing role of supported lodgings services in local authority Children's Services response to the Every Child Matters agenda initiated by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. In 2008 a working group was established which commissioned a survey of practice and operational or funding issues experienced by supported lodgings services for young people leaving care<sup>3</sup>. Like the CLG Specialist Advisers referred to above, the research, including four regional focus groups of practitioners, found considerable consistency of ethos and general approach

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<sup>1</sup> National Youth Homelessness Scheme at [www.communities.gov.uk/youthhomelessness](http://www.communities.gov.uk/youthhomelessness)

<sup>2</sup> *Making a difference: supported lodgings as a housing option for young people* can be downloaded from [www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/makingadifference](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/makingadifference)

<sup>3</sup> *Supported Lodgings Schemes and Care Leavers Survey*, Report, The Fostering Network May 2009 and *Supported Lodgings and Young People leaving care*, Literature Review, the Fostering Network 2008, both available from the Fostering Network website at [www.fostering.net](http://www.fostering.net)

among established services, but wide variations in the availability of supported lodgings services to young people and the operational details of established services.

- 1.5 Communities and Local Government and DCSF were both represented on the advisory group for this report, reflecting an increasing trend, supported by central government, for joint working at strategic and operational levels locally between Housing and Childrens' Services. A working party of this reference group has emerged comprising four organisations representing the whole housing/support/care spectrum of provision for young people – Depaul UK<sup>4</sup> the Fostering Network<sup>5</sup>, NCAS<sup>6</sup> and YMCA England<sup>7</sup>. These organisations are committed to taking forward the development of supported lodgings as a recognised service for young people in need of support through the transition to adulthood, whether they have been in local authority care or not.
- 1.6 The working party took forward recommendations from the October 2008 conference<sup>8</sup> that a national steering group or umbrella body be set up to be a national voice for supported lodgings services for all young people, and to facilitate the sharing of information and good practice. Regional forum meetings of practitioners held during the winter of 2008/09 discussed the possible elements of a national framework of standards for supported lodgings services, and the initiatives which a national umbrella body might pursue to disseminate good practice.
- 1.7 The *Home from Home* conference was designed as a next step, to consolidate and combine the various regulatory and strategic initiatives across central and local government, and to bring together policy-makers and practitioners in the field of supported lodgings with a view to establishing a nationally-consistent framework and standards for such services.
- 1.8 In order to consider nationally-applicable standards and values, an agreed lexicon is necessary. Across England similar operational arrangements are known by a variety of terms. Most critically:
  - the householder offering supported lodgings accommodation to a young person may be known as a host, a carer, a provider, an accommodator
  - the organisation co-ordinating the recruitment, selection and payment of householders, and the matching of young people to householders may also be known as a provider, or as an agency or scheme
  - the overall local framework of governance, administration and funding to make supported lodgings available to young people in a locality may be known as a scheme or a service.

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<sup>4</sup> Further information on Depaul UK is available at [www.depaulnightstopuk.org](http://www.depaulnightstopuk.org)

<sup>5</sup> Further information on the Fostering Network is available at [www.fostering.net](http://www.fostering.net)

<sup>6</sup> Further information on the National Care Advisory Service (NCAS) is available at [www.leavingcare.org](http://www.leavingcare.org)

<sup>7</sup> Further information on YMCA England is available at [www.ymca.org](http://www.ymca.org)

<sup>8</sup> *National supported lodgings conference, 1 October 2008: Evaluation report* can be downloaded from [www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/conferenceevaluationreport](http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/conferenceevaluationreport)

The Home from Home conference proposed a common terminology as a working definition for the event with the respective terms hosts/carers, and schemes/ services. Delegates were asked to consider whether these terms, - that could be used interchangeably or in combination with each other , -were terms they could 'live with' as a means of establishing a common language.

- 1.9 Robert Tapsfield, Chief Executive of the Fostering Network, chaired the conference, summarising at the outset its three main objectives:
- to review the contribution made by effective practice in supported lodgings services
  - to review the context of changing public policies towards looked after young people
  - to consider the feasibility and advantages of a national forum of supported lodgings service providers.
- 1.10 Over the day the conference split into three parts, each of which is outlined in greater detail in this report:
- reviewing policy and national developments
  - discussing local practice and the possible advantages and nature of a supported lodgings 'good practice manifesto'
  - reviewing the feeling of the conference about the desirability of a national forum.
- 1.11 A complete set of presentation slides and many of the handouts provided at workshop sessions can be obtained through the Fostering Network's website [www.fostering.net](http://www.fostering.net)

## 2. **The current context: policy and national activity**

- 2.1 Developments in the national context offer opportunities for supported lodgings services to expand and consolidate as an important contributor to young people's success in establishing an independent adult life after experiencing local authority care or homelessness.
- 2.2 Speaking on behalf of Communities and Local Government (CLG), Val Keen, Specialist Adviser on Youth Homelessness, spoke of:
- the statistical evidence that 16 and 17-year-old young people who are accepted as homeless need support: they are five times as likely as their peers to be not in education, employment or training (NEET) and over half have been excluded or suspended from school and/or suffer from anxiety, depression or other mental health problems
  - the progress made in reducing the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless young people – a reduction by two thirds since September 2006 when Ruth Kelly MP first announced the CLG's commitment to eliminating its use for 16 and 17-year-olds (except in an emergency)

- the evidence collated in preparing the CLG publication *Making a Difference – supported lodgings for young people* (CLG 2008), that *Every Child Matters* outcomes are more successfully achieved by vulnerable young people in supported lodgings schemes than in other forms of supported housing, especially in relation to learning
  - the fact that only 2 per cent of young people receiving Supporting People services are in supported lodgings and that CLG would like to see greater availability of this option for young people for whom it is suitable and who wish to take it up.
- 2.3 It was important also to remember, she said, that emergency supported lodgings in the form of Nightstops or Crashpads, can play an important role in prevention of homelessness as part of a coherent strategy delivered by Children's Services and Housing, and that Targeted Youth Support initiatives are increasingly able to achieve better outcomes for families through such an approach.
- 2.4 Mark Burrows, on behalf of DCSF, said that supported lodgings services are an important option for young people making transitions from regulated settings as looked after children to full independence when they are ready for it between 18 and 25. Such provision could and should give young people a foundation for the rest of their lives.
- 2.5 Saying that seven years after the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 became effective there is evidence that too many young people leave care too soon and are not placed in the right accommodation, he outlined relevant provisions of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008, and regulations and guidance now being produced, particularly focusing on plans to:
- achieve greater consistency and stability for individual young people throughout the period of transition to independent adult life when they are ready for it, not at a specific birthday
  - involve young people to a greater extent in choosing and reviewing their path to independence
  - ensure that decision-making about each step of a young person's pathway is more transparent and consciously focused on their needs and readiness.
- 2.6 He also outlined emerging findings from the DCSF *Staying Put* programme – a three-year pilot programme in 10 local authority areas which commenced in 2008 with the aim of enabling young people leaving local authority care to continue to live with their foster carers beyond the age of 18, should they so wish. Issues concerning funding and the approach to support for the young person are similar to those affecting supported lodgings for young people who are not in care and include:
- the complexity of funding and the need for a long-term commissioning approach
  - the potential needs of foster carers for additional, specialist support to enable them to support the young person in their transition to independent adulthood

- the need for diversity and flexibility in order to reflect young people's diverse needs, wishes and aspirations.

2.7 Professor Bob Broad of Southbank University has recently completed a study<sup>9</sup> for the Fostering Network working in partnership with NCAS. This study focused on services/schemes providing accommodation with support to young people who are, or who have been, looked after by the local authority. This study had ADCS approval and had three components, a Literature review, an initial scoping study of four contrasting supporting lodgings schemes/ services and a fuller research study. Of 105 services identified, 57 (providing a total of 1,159 places for young people) participated in the survey he conducted, the results of which he outlined.

2.8 Key elements of the picture which emerged from his research were:

- current provision is very patchy across England
- research indicates that between 10 per cent and 25 per cent of young people leaving care in any one year have lived in supported lodgings (between 830 and 2,075)
- there is a wide range of scale of service – the smallest having two hosts/carers and the largest 150
- services differ considerably from each other in the way that they are organised (as between local authority and voluntary sectors), funded and staffed, but there is considerable consensus about the objectives of the service
- most services offer both emergency (short-term) and medium term accommodation to young people who are initially assessed as having low or medium levels of need, although typically additional needs emerge as the placement progresses
- commitment to young people's safety in the supported lodging placement, and to ensuring that hosts/carers have appropriate training and support is very consistent, although services' approach to achieving these vary considerably.

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<sup>9</sup> *Supported Lodgings Schemes and Care Leavers Survey*, Report, The Fostering Network, May2009 and *Supported Lodgings and Young People* available at the Fostering Network website at [www.fostering.net](http://www.fostering.net)

### Training offered to hosts/carers

The research found that some services / schemes offer training in many of these areas, while others would like to but are unable to resource provision. It was not clear whether hosts/ carers in any service are required to undertake some or all of the training offered.

Examples of training offered in supported lodgings schemes/ services were:-

Safeguarding/child protection	Health and safety
Roles and responsibilities	Adolescent development
Substance abuse/alcohol	First aid
Sexual health	Education/ Training/ Employment
Managing challenging behaviour	Issues for Unaccompanied
Mental health	Asylum Seeking and Children/Young People

2.9 Pippa Bow, of the Fostering Network's DCSF funded Fosterline , discussed the complex implications for the personal finances (taxation and welfare benefits) of hosts/carers providing supported lodgings accommodation to young people, distinguishing between three groups of people:

- Group 1: those providing accommodation and care to young people aged 16 or 17 who are looked after by a local authority. Some schemes termed supported lodgings are effectively fostering .If the young people are looked after and the scheme meets fostering standards/ regulations, their taxation and benefits are governed by legislation applicable to foster carers: treated as self- employed and an income of £10,000 from fostering is exempt from tax, plus and allowance of £250 per week for each child aged 11 – 17 inclusive. For those hosts/carers on benefits, fostering payments do not count as income for benefit purposes, so long as there is a child placed with them.
- Group 2: those in schemes providing accommodation and care to young people aged 16 or 17 who are not looked after, and/or former looked after children/young people aged 18 plus, also young people not formerly looked after if the scheme meets appropriate standards. Under the Adult Placement Carers arrangements (see below) such hosts/carers are treated as self- employed and can claim allowances up to £400 per week for the first young adult accommodated and a further £250 per week for each of the second or third (the arrangements are restricted to hosts/carers accommodating no more than three young people). For those hosts/carers on benefits, Section 23/24 payments in respect of a young person who was a care placement with them continue not to count as income. Otherwise, however, all other elements of payment (which may come from a variety of sources including Local Housing allowance/Housing Benefit, contributions from young people or payments from the provider funded from Supporting People funds) are regarded as rent for board and lodging and are taken into account.

'If some meals are provided' the first £20 per week plus 50 per cent of the remainder of this income may be disregarded in calculating the host/carer's benefits.

- Group 3: those providing accommodation and support to young people whose placement has been interrupted by a return to family, or time at university. These are examples of placements slipping out of one regime and into another with which the host/carer may not be familiar and which may leave them out of pocket, but there are several others. Pippa emphasised the need for good advice to foster carers and hosts/carers to ensure that they are aware of the impact of changing circumstances. The Fostering Network has published a *Signpost* guide to the financial implications for foster carers of caring for a young person aged over 18<sup>10</sup>.
- 2.10 Pippa drew attention to a significant step forward from work with Revenue and Customs in the autumn of 2008: HMRC have agreed that Group 2 above offer something different from private lodgings and that the Adult Placement tax arrangements<sup>11</sup> are applicable. While this is good news, services are finding that knowledge and interpretation in local tax offices varies. In addition, hosts/carers in Group 2 are still not reimbursed to the same extent as those in Group 1, if they are working.
- 2.11 John Short, independent consultant, addressed the financial regimes affecting young people living in supported lodgings. He highlighted the discrepancies between welfare and other financial benefits accessible to young people aged 16 and 17 who are looked after and those who are not, and concerns about the constraints of benefits regimes for those aged 18 and over.
- 2.12 There are still significant discrepancies between the taxation and welfare benefits regimes applicable to the three groups of hosts/carers and to young people not living with their families. Two concerns were identified:
- work needs to be undertaken on taxation and on benefits to achieve parity for hosts/carers offering similar accommodation / support services to 16/17-year-olds, and which is less disadvantageous to both hosts/carers and young people aged 18 and over
  - a definitive factsheet needs to be produced.
- 2.13 Judy Walsh of the Fostering Network and Jo Gunner of YMCA England reported on outcomes from regional for a of supported lodgings service providers held as a result of discussion at the National Supported Lodgings Conference in York on 1 October 2008<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> An order form for the Fostering Network Signpost guide *Caring For a Young Person Aged 18+* can be downloaded from [www.fostering.net/resources/382](http://www.fostering.net/resources/382)

<sup>11</sup> HMRC Help sheet 236 *Foster and Adult Placement Carers*, available from [www.hmrc.gov.uk](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk) (HS236)

<sup>12</sup> *Evaluation Report* available from [www.communities.gov.uk/youthhomelessness](http://www.communities.gov.uk/youthhomelessness)

2.14 Although, as reported by Professor Bob Broad earlier, provision and practice varied considerably across the English regions, there was considerable support in principle for:

- a single, national 'voice' for supported lodgings services for young people who are looked after and those who are otherwise vulnerable
- a framework of quality assurance of services which would include agreed minimum standards to protect young people's safety and deliver appropriate support, so that all stakeholders, especially young people and their carers, know what to expect.

2.15 Judy reported that, through the regional discussions, an initial outline analysis of local practice in supported lodgings services had been conducted, comparing the arrangements with the provisions of Schedule 3 of the Fostering Regulations (minimum standards for fostering placements) on two counts:

- assessment of potential hosts/carers
- supervision, support and training of hosts/carers.

It had been found that supported lodgings schemes set very similar standards and used very similar methods, but services differed considerably (from fostering and from each other) in the detail.

**Suggested minimum standards**

Based on practice which all or most current schemes/ services have in common, Judy suggested an outline of what could be minimum standards for supported lodgings.

Assessment of households – this includes a number of home visits	Regular visits to hosts/carers
CRB checks on all household members	Out of hours support for hosts/ carers
All household members including children to be seen	Training -learning/ development programme for hosts/ carers
Health and safety check – eg boiler check -/smoke alarm/carbon monoxide alarm	
Two references (not from relatives)	
Panel to make recommendations for approval	

### 3. Taking forward the 'national voice' and quality assurance

3.1 Workshops were facilitated by practitioners and young people or hosts representing two contrasting schemes/services. The aim was to generate discussion and thought as to whether, in spite of the diversity of the sector, there is any viability in the idea of some baseline minimum standards. Three aspects of the question were discussed:

- recruitment and selection of hosts/carers  
(facilitated by Bournemouth Supported Lodgings Scheme and Herts Young Homeless Group)
  
- support and training for hosts/carers  
(facilitated by representatives from Catch 22's supported lodgings scheme in Kent and by York Nightstop)
  
- the needs of young people which services can respond to  
(facilitated by representatives from Stonham's supported lodgings scheme in Hampshire and by Young Devon).

3.2 A further workshop, facilitated by presenters from the plenary session on financial issues, Pippa Bow and John Short, considered the issues emerging from their analysis which need to be addressed in order to achieve comparable services for all young people for whom supported lodgings are appropriate.

### 3.3 Summary of feedback from workshops

#### Standards for the recruitment and selection of hosts/carers

The facilitators reviewed the practice of their respective services in relation to the fostering minimum standards as discussed earlier in the day.

There was great consistency of concern among delegates that young people should be safe and that their (emerging) support needs should be quickly identified by concerned hosts/ carers who understood the limitations of their role (see below). CRB checks were universal, but the extent of these among the host's household and wider network of regular visitors varied, as did the number of visits, style of interviews and extent of additional references. Overall the principle was agreed that standards for supported lodgings should be at least as high as those that are applicable for the recruitment and assessment of foster carers for children and young people who are looked after. However, there was some anxiety about losing the freedom and flexibility in detail which exists at present, if any standards were too prescriptive.

Following discussion, the group split up to consider different aspects of a young person's life (emotional, social, spiritual, etc.) with a view to reaching a view on the expectations or 'person specification' for a host/carer to which the service would be recruiting. Considering the results together, it was widely

agreed that (a) there is a fundamental difference between the host/carer role in emergency and very short-term placements and that in longer-term (up to 2 years) placements and (b) host/ carers should be concerned adults but not a substitute for professional expertise. Beyond this there was little consensus about an ideal 'person specification'. In most cases, instances were given by practitioners of positive outcomes for young people from hosts/carers who did not at first sight seem to fit the mould. The individual matching of young person to host was discussed as more important than deciding in advance "what makes a good host/ carer" as a general rule.

#### 3.4 Standards for training and support of hosts/carers

Delegates discussed the value (in terms of service quality) of three aspects of support for hosts/carers by service providers:

- Opportunities for inter-host networking and the resulting peer support.
- Training.
- Supervision and one-to-ones.

The group worked on flipcharts to consider the advantages and disadvantages of minimum standards in each of the three areas. There was some concern that too many expectations of formal participation in the service might deter some hosts/carers and that enforcement of requirements could be either counter-productive or patchy. The balance of opinion, though was that the benefits of all three of these are so great that they should be offered and efforts made by each service to engage 100 per cent of hosts/carers in them, although methods might vary from service to service (and potentially from host to host), depending upon local circumstances and the services' requirements.

#### 3.5 The needs of young people

Delegates agreed that there is little to distinguish the needs of young people who are, or have recently been, looked after by a local authority and those who are at risk of homelessness, the implication being that the similar service standards and objectives are applied, and a single framework of quality assurance would be appropriate. Discussion focused on getting a relationship in place between the host/carer and young person placed with them within which emerging needs can be identified and the young person encouraged to address them, including:

- Putting effort and time into the young person/host matching process, even though this may be more demanding for the young person (uncertainty, and the need for interim accommodation) and less target-focused. Key elements included getting a match which the young person feels they have exercised informed choice over, including the things they won't like, and which will enable them to maintain their positive networks and activities.
- Ensuring that the host has as much knowledge of the young person as possible in advance (not just professional needs assessment, but what the young person likes/doesn't like, their interests, plans, beliefs, etc).

The facilitators asked the group to consider a number of scenarios in which a host/carer might have cause to be concerned about the young person living in their house. It was agreed that hosts/carers should not be expected to be able to meet all the possible need of young people, but should be attuned to potential needs and warning signs, ready to broach difficult questions with the young person, but keeping an open mind, and aware of a wide range of professional and specialist help if they need to suggest it.

### 3.6 Financial issues

Pippa Bow and John Short invited delegates to consider the issues for resolution identified during the earlier plenary presentation.

- scheme parity – ‘looked after’ young people and ‘vulnerable’ young people
- returning to placement post-18 Local Authority allowance disregard
- young people transferring to adult placement schemes
- Income Tax, National Insurance, and Welfare Benefit information and guidance
- disregarding of Local Housing Allowance, Supporting People contributions and contributions from young people
- insurance cover.

There was considerable discussion on the complex discrepancies between different categories and ages of young people, and the issues which arise particularly when young people move from one category to another while continuing to live with one host/carer. Many variations in practice and interpretation were reported between services and (more particularly) between tax and benefits offices.

In discussing questions of insurance it was noted that:

- foster carers can be insured against allegations against them by a placed young person only up to the age of 18
- young people over 18 in supported lodgings placements cannot currently get insurance for allegations made by younger children
- if a host/carer is the victim of theft by a young person placed with them their household insurance may not cover the loss – some local authorities underwrite the supported lodgings service and reimburse or replace losses suffered by hosts/carers
- a host/carer’s household insurance may also be invalidated if damage is caused maliciously
- host/carers should be sure to inform their insurers (while protecting data confidentiality) of any criminal convictions (including spent ones) against young people placed with them, and tell the young person that they are required to do this.

The Fostering Network is currently gathering evidence on these and other insurance issues for hosts/carers of young people aged 18+.

#### 4. **Further actions**

4.1 Una Barry of Depaul UK and Sue Baxter of NCAS reported from a review of the regional focus groups that supported lodgings services' successful flexibility should not become an excuse for not resolving inconsistencies and discrepancies. They also referred to the need for local supported lodgings services to be an identifiable element in local strategies and Local Area Agreements, particularly with the pooling of Supporting People funding within Area Based Grant.

4.2 They outlined three priorities for action:

- payment of Housing Benefit to service providers, not to individual hosts/carers
- a single stream of revenue funding for supported lodgings services, regardless of the category of young people accommodated
- parity between foster carers and other hosts/carers in the framework of personal finance regulations.

4.3 To take this and other issues forward, supported lodgings services need to become a recognised sector, with an identifiable strategic role, characterised by specific quality standards. Manifestations of the 'single voice' which had been discussed include:

- an identifiable representative or umbrella organisation
- a national forum of service representatives
- an information resource hub
- an online networking and advice facility
- a framework of minimum quality standards possibly reinforced by a 'kitemark'
- continued development of the national register of supported lodgings schemes commenced during the Fostering Network/NCAS research<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> To contact another service on this register, find contact details at [www.fostering.net/resources/documents/leaving\\_care/supported\\_lodgings\\_database.doc](http://www.fostering.net/resources/documents/leaving_care/supported_lodgings_database.doc)

## Conclusion

- 5.1 There was consensus at the conference that there is far more to gain than to lose in moving to establish a national voice. Although there are some anxieties among service providers about possible loss of flexibility, and among hosts about being excluded by professionalisation of their role, it was agreed that such nervousness should not deter anyone from moving forward on this.
- 5.2 The Fostering Network will continue to work in partnership with NCAS, YMCA England and The Depaul UK with a view to developing a combined project proposal to take the conference recommendations forward.
- 5.3 The Fostering Network and NCAS will make the database of supported lodgings schemes in England which has been created as an outcome of the research study and the conference, available on their respective websites.<sup>14</sup> All schemes/ services listed have given their consent to this effect with a view to spreading knowledge to inform developing practice.

### **Report written by**

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<sup>14</sup> To contact another service on this register, find contact details at [www.fostering.net/resources/documents/leaving\\_care/supported\\_lodgings\\_database.doc](http://www.fostering.net/resources/documents/leaving_care/supported_lodgings_database.doc)  
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