

Unregulated accommodation banned for vulnerable children under 16

A ban on placing vulnerable children under the age of 16 in unregulated accommodation will come into force in September, the Education Secretary Gavin Williamson has announced, as part of a series of reforms to drive up standards in children's social care.

Children in care under 16 will no longer be allowed to be accommodated in unregulated independent or semi-independent placements, helping to ensure the most vulnerable are cared for in settings that best meet their needs. Regulations have been laid in Parliament today, Friday 19 February, for the ban to come into force in September, as part of the Government's response to its consultation [last year](#) aimed at ensuring the highest quality provision for all children and young people in care.

Published today, the Department for Education's response to the [consultation](#) makes clear that while independent and semi-independent provision can be the right option for some older children where it is high quality and meets their needs, children aged under 16 are too young for this type of accommodation – which is intended to facilitate supported living for older children developing their independence before they leave the care system.

In his response, the Education Secretary has also announced that plans will be developed to support local authorities in creating more places in children's homes, backed by additional investment, building on the £24 million announced at the Spending Review and recognising that there are pressures on some local authorities to find the right placement for a child.

He also confirmed that he will be moving forward with plans for legislating at the earliest opportunity to give Ofsted new powers to take enforcement action against illegal unregistered providers, who should be registered as children's homes but are operating without the correct registration in place. This will enable Ofsted to take quicker action to register or close down these homes, building on their existing powers to prosecute providers operating without the correct registration and strengthening the options available to them.

The Government will also introduce national standards for unregulated settings that are accommodating 16 and 17-year-old children in care and care leavers, to raise the bar for the quality of this provision and ensure consistency across the country. The Department for Education will shortly launch a consultation on the new national standards, so that as more older children come into the care system, a high quality option is available where they can receive the support they need to prepare for adult life.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Vulnerable children under 16 are too young for the type of accommodation that provides a place to stay but not the care and support that they need. The action taken today – supported by the sector and in response to their views – is an important step in making sure children in care are placed in settings that give them the highest chances of success.

We know that for some older young people, independent or semi-independent accommodation can be right in helping them transition to adult life – but these settings need to be consistently high quality. We cannot be complacent about the standards we expect to be met for children in our care.

Our consultation response sets out the urgent steps we are taking to raise the bar for these children, which alongside the independent review of children's social care, will level up outcomes for those most in need.

Mike Thiedke, Depaul UK CEO said:

Children's homes are the right place for many looked after children and I am glad that the Government intends to work with local authorities to open more. Some 16 and 17 year olds want to live in places where they have more independence – specialist young people's supported accommodation can be the best option for these young people.

Depaul UK provides this type of accommodation. We already have close local authority oversight and extensive internal policies and procedures to ensure we provide safe, supportive accommodation, and we believe other providers should operate with these controls in place to protect young people. I support today's announcement that national standards will be introduced with new powers for Ofsted.

Depaul will continue to work with the Department for Education to do our utmost so that young people living in appropriate accommodation can look forward to a bright future.

[Statistics](#) show that across the year 2018-19 there were 660 looked after children placed in independent or in semi-independent living accommodation who were under the age of 16 when their placement started. This is 5% of looked after children in these settings during 2018-19. New data published today shows the characteristics and placements in independent or semi-independent living accommodation for looked after children under the age of 16 in England.

The Government's drive to raise standards and level up opportunities for the most vulnerable in society sits alongside an investment of almost £4.4 million to extend Covid-19 response programmes run by major children's charities aimed at reaching 'hidden' children who may face neglect or

exploitation, especially while they spend more time at home. It adds to plans to create a National Centre for Family Hubs that will improve families' access to vital services across the country, and the confirmation from November's Spending Review of an additional £24 million investment in 2021-22 to expand capacity within secure children's homes, as well as £165 million funding for the Government's [Troubled Families programme](#).

The response to the consultation on unregulated provision builds on a campaign of improvement across children's social care, including last month's launch of the wide-ranging and independent [review into children's social care](#). The review is being led by independent chair Josh MacAlister and will look at improving outcomes for children that have experienced the care system.

Statement by the Foreign Ministers of France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States of America

"The Foreign Ministers of France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the U.S. Secretary of State held a virtual meeting, for the second time in this format since Secretary Blinken took office, to discuss Iran and other pressing issues. They reaffirmed the centrality of the transatlantic partnership in dealing with the security, climate, economic, health and other challenges the world faces.

"Regarding Iran, the E3 and the United States expressed their shared fundamental security interest in upholding the nuclear non-proliferation regime and ensuring that Iran can never develop a nuclear weapon. In this context, the conclusion of the JCPOA was a key achievement of multilateral diplomacy. The E3 welcomed the United States' stated intention to return to diplomacy with Iran as well as the resumption of a confident and in-depth dialogue between the E3 and the United States. The Ministers affirmed strong interest in continuing their consultations and coordination, including with China and Russia, on this key security issue, recognizing the role of the High Representative of the European Union as Coordinator of the Joint Commission.

"The E3 and the United States affirmed their shared objective of Iran's return to full compliance with its commitments under the JCPOA. Secretary Blinken reiterated that, as President Biden has said, if Iran comes back into strict compliance with its commitments under the JCPOA, the United States will do the same and is prepared to engage in discussions with Iran toward that end.

"In this context, the E3 and the United States called on Iran not to take any

additional steps, in particular with respect to the suspension of the Additional Protocol and to any limitations on IAEA verification activities in Iran. The E3 and the United States are united in underlining the dangerous nature of a decision to limit IAEA access, and urge Iran to consider the consequences of such grave action, particularly at this time of renewed diplomatic opportunity. They reiterated their full support for the professional and impartial role of the IAEA and its Director General and their efforts to implement the necessary verification and monitoring of Iran's nuclear commitments under the JCPOA.

"The E3 and the United States also expressed their shared concerns over Iran's recent actions to produce both uranium enriched up to 20% and uranium metal. These activities have no credible civil justification. Uranium metal production is a key step in the development of a nuclear weapon.

"The E3 welcomed the prospect of a U.S. and Iranian return to compliance with the JCPOA. The E3 and the United States affirmed their determination to then strengthen the JCPOA and, together with regional parties and the wider international community, address broader security concerns related to Iran's missile programs and regional activities. The E3 and the United States are committed to working together toward these goals.

"The Ministers also called on Iran to release all our arbitrarily detained nationals and reunite them with their families. They also expressed deep concern about the continuing grave human rights violations in Iran.

"The E3 and the United States look forward to engaging with partners in order to work together toward these key objectives.

"They expressed their joint determination to work toward de-escalating tensions in the Gulf region. They stressed in particular the urgency of ending the war in Yemen, while reaffirming their steadfast commitment to the security of their regional partners. On Yemen, the Ministers agreed to work closely together to support United Nations Special Envoy Griffiths' efforts to end the war and to address the humanitarian crisis. They expressed concern about the recent Houthi offensive against Marib and strikes against civilian infrastructure in Saudi Arabia, calling upon the Houthis and all Yemeni parties to engage constructively in the political process.

"On Iraq, the Ministers reiterated their condemnation of the February 15 rocket attack in Erbil. They expressed their condolences for the victims, their families, and the Iraqi people and emphasized that attacks on U.S., Coalition and NATO personnel and facilities will not be tolerated. Ministers reiterated their support for the Iraqi Government.

"Discussing the evolving challenge posed by Daesh, ministers re-committed to continuing critical efforts to target and eliminate the Daesh threat in Iraq and Syria, including efforts via the 83-member Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh. They also emphasized the growing importance of coordinating efforts to target the threat posed by Daesh branches and networks worldwide.

"The Ministers agreed to closely coordinate to address the global challenges

posed by China, as well as the need for cooperation across a range of issues, including climate change.

“On Myanmar, they condemned the military coup. They called on military leaders to immediately end the state of emergency, restore power to the democratically elected government, refrain from violence, release all those unjustly detained, and respect human rights and the rule of law.

“The Ministers agreed on the importance of further strengthening NATO and ensuring it is positioned to address today’s strategic realities, building on the NATO Reflection Group’s recommendations.

“Ministers agreed that strong international and multilateral cooperation was essential to ending the COVID 19 pandemic and building back better collectively. They reviewed efforts on the global response, including support for rapid deployment of vaccines globally, primarily through the ACT-A/COVAX facility.

“They agreed to work with urgency to address the climate crisis ahead of the 26th UN Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties in Glasgow in November. They agreed that significant collective action was needed to implement the Paris Agreement, including keeping a 1.5 degree Celsius temperature rise within reach. They looked forward to the upcoming U.S.-hosted Leaders’ Climate Summit as an important forum for enhanced climate ambition.”

[Surge testing to be deployed in areas around Leeds](#)

Press release

A further targeted area will have additional testing made available to control and suppress the potential spread of a COVID-19 variant.



Working in partnership with the local authority, additional testing and genomic sequencing is being deployed to targeted areas in Leeds LS8, including parts of Harehills and the area just north of Easterly Road where the COVID-19 variant first identified in South Africa has been found.

Extra testing is being introduced in addition to existing extensive testing. In combination with following the current lockdown rules and remembering '[Hands. Face. Space](#)' advice, it will help to monitor and suppress the spread of the virus.

Positive cases will be sequenced for genomic data to help understand COVID-19 variants and their spread within these areas.

People living within this targeted area are strongly encouraged to take a COVID-19 test when offered, whether they are showing symptoms or not.

People with symptoms should [book a test in the usual way](#), and those without symptoms should [visit their local authority website](#) for more information.

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UK renews commitment to NATO missions

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace confirmed to fellow Defence Ministers representing NATO's 30 members that the UK will scale up its own commitment in line with the Alliance's expansion of NATO Mission Iraq.

The virtual Defence Ministerial also provided the opportunity for the Defence Secretary to detail to allies how the UK Carrier Strike Group 21 – which is setting off for its first operational deployment this year – will boost NATO's capability to respond to the complex threats we face as an Alliance in an unstable world.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

The UK is setting a course for the future of NATO by modernising our own Armed Forces to keep the country and its allies safe in a more threatening world, following the record settlement of more than £24bn.

Our commitment to NATO is at the heart of this approach and I was pleased to discuss with allies our shared vision of deepened cooperation, refreshed operational concepts, and the use of cutting-edge technology to counter the threats of today and

tomorrow.

First and foremost we are committed to delivering on NATO operations. The UK Government remains resolute in our support to the government of Afghanistan in the face of unacceptable Taliban violence. We are determined to ensure that conditions are met for achieving a lasting political settlement, which is the only means of ensuring security from terrorism for the people of Afghanistan, the United Kingdom and its Allies.

Mr Wallace highlighted the forthcoming Integrated Review which will set the course for a modernised, threat-focused and sustainable defence – with NATO occupying a central place. The Defence Secretary told allies that the UK's commitment to NATO remains unwavering and explained how the Integrated Review will match the Alliance's goals by increasing spending, embracing innovation and delivering a force structure embracing all domains

Allies cooperating to counter shared threats

The NATO Defence ministerial provided the opportunity for ministers to discuss the complex challenges facing the Alliance including current operations, countering hostile state activity, and the emergence of disruptive technologies.

Ministers agreed an implementation strategy for researching, investing in and adopting emerging technologies into the Alliance. This will ensure NATO stays ahead of the curve and maintains a technological edge ahead of adversaries.

Defence Ministers also discussed the future of the NATO Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan. The Defence Secretary affirmed to allies that the UK remains committed to the operation and supporting the Afghan peace process.

Mr Wallace also welcomed the progress made by allies towards fairer burden sharing. 2021 will be the seventh consecutive year of increased defence spending by European allies and Canada.

NATO Mission Iraq expands

Over the two-day virtual conference defence ministers from across the NATO Alliance agreed to expand the mission to Iraq on an incremental basis to bolster Iraq's fight against the terrorist threat of Daesh.

This will see the UK continue to support the NATO mission which provides professional military training to the Iraqi security forces and is being expanded to cover more Iraqi Government institutions. The UK will work with NATO over the coming weeks and months to confirm the size and nature of the UK's contribution. Working alongside our international partners, UK personnel have trained over 120,000 Iraqi and Kurdish security forces as part of counter-Daesh efforts.

The UK is committed to supporting the government of Iraq in further developing its counter-terrorism capabilities, as the threat from Daesh continues to evolve.

UK Carrier Strike Group sails with Allies

The UK Carrier Strike Group will also be extending NATO influence during its maiden deployment later in the year. NATO allies will contribute to the CSG 21 deployment, including the United States who will be contributing fifth-generation aircraft from the US Marine Corps, and a US Navy destroyer.

The Carrier Strike Group's capabilities will be on show during Exercise Strike Warrior, taking place off the coast of Scotland in May. The UK-led war-fighting exercise, including several other NATO navies, will be the final test for the Carrier Strike Group before it undertakes Air and Maritime missions in the Atlantic, the Mediterranean and Black Sea.

A345 ash dieback tree felling completed ahead of schedule

The Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO), together with its industry partner, Landmarc Support Services (Landmarc) and subcontractor KWR Plant Hire, carried out the tree-felling clearance scheme to remove trees infected with ash dieback.

Thousands of ash trees across Salisbury Plain Training Area, as well as many more across the country, are infected with the disease. There is no cure or treatment and over time infected trees will weaken, causing branches to fall and trees to eventually die and collapse.

This presents a significant health and safety risk, especially alongside roads, public rights of way and woodland areas used by military personnel for training and the public for recreation activities.

For the safety of road users and local residents, it was necessary to remove infected trees along the A345. This posed many challenges due to the location and local infrastructure, not least because of the power lines that were tangled up with trees. As a result, following detailed consultation with local authorities and Highways England, a number of temporary road closures and diversions were implemented. These enabled the safe use of specialist machinery to protect onsite workers and the general public.

The process also required 5 power shutdowns to fell the trees that were wrapped around the power lines. This protected the local power network from disruption if ash dieback had caused a branch or tree to bring a power line down. Throughout the work, public transport continued as bus services were

still able to operate.

The early completion of the felling along the A345 means reduced disruption for local people and a lower cost to the taxpayer. About 2300 tonnes of wood was removed by the felling team in 45 days. This was slightly more than expected and was sold as biomass chips to be used for energy generation, partially offsetting the cost of the operation.

Further ash dieback felling continues at Heytesbury and more is planned in several areas across Salisbury Plain. Regular inspections will continue and may identify other areas where felling is required.

Lieutenant Colonel Tim Jalland, DIO's Commander South West Training Estate, said:

This is a fantastic example of good planning, communications and collaboration which has enabled the project to finish well ahead of schedule, protecting those that use the estate and the public at large.

I'm really pleased to see how successful it has been and would like to thank the local communities for their patience and forbearance whilst having to deal with the inevitable disruption caused by the road closures.

Judith Peachey, Landmarc's Forestry and Arboriculture Manager said:

So far, around 80,000 infected trees have been felled on Salisbury Plain, including on 20 miles of roadside. We now need to focus on the process of replanting and regeneration and have held extensive discussions with the Forestry Commission and Natural England about the restoration of felled areas, which is reflected in the approved felling licences for the operations.

Within the woodland compartments, space has been left for the natural regeneration of tree seed already in the soil and this will be enhanced with the planting of native broadleaved species. A small proportion of felled timber has also been left on site to provide deadwood habitats to help maintain the current ground flora as much as possible.

The removal of ash is a devastating loss to the local landscape, but we are carefully considering which species will be planted so that we can provide a woodland that is more resilient to disease for future generations.

DIO and Landmarc began the programme to fell infected trees across Salisbury Plain Training Area in early 2020 at Ashdown Copse near Tidworth.

Further information on ash dieback on the MOD estate can be found at [Ash Dieback on the Ministry of Defence estate](#).

Queries regarding the felling process on Salisbury Plain Training Area should be directed to nsc@landmarc.mod.uk or 0800 022 3334.

Further information

- Ash dieback is a serious fungal disease of ash trees, caused by a fungus now called *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*.
- infection can lead to the death of young trees in just 2 to 3 years, and of mature trees within 3 to 5 years.
- all trees removed had been identified during health and safety tree inspections and surveys. These are carried out annually to monitor the health of our trees in high-risk locations.
- the ash dieback tree felling work across Salisbury Plain is taking place in phases and aims to be completed in 2022, with tree health surveying and monitoring continuing once felling is complete. The first phase of felling targeted Ashdown Copse. Phase 2 included the A345 felling and continued work at Ashdown Copse, as well as other locations where ash dieback has been identified including Erlestoke, Everleigh, Heytesbury and along neighbouring roadsides. However, there may be further outbreaks to be dealt with in future years.
- to protect the public and estate users, DIO foresters, Landmarc staff and ecologists are working with the [Forestry Commission](#) and [Natural England](#) to inspect and remove the infected trees.
- felling licences have been approved by the Forestry Commission. Licences are only granted by the Forestry Commission after consultations with statutory bodies and a period of public consultation. Trees felled will be replaced with suitable alternatives, in line with the Felling License approved by the Forestry Commission.
- we are felling the minimum number of trees to reduce risk to an acceptable level and only in areas where there is a clear risk of harm to people. In other areas infected ash trees will be left and regularly surveyed, to see if they have any natural resilience or resistance to the disease.