

Matching Looked After Children and Young People: Admissions Guidance for Residential Services

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1. Underpinning legislation and guidance

As corporate parents we must ensure that children and young people's care experiences are positive, and enable them to thrive. By promoting best practice in admissions and matching, we are aspiring to make residential care a positive choice for all children in Scotland who require it.

The nature and impact of the circumstances that result in children and young people being looked after means their needs are often extremely complex. Young people should be placed in services where they can be assured of receiving the support they need to grow, thrive, achieve their potential, and experience placement stability and felt permanence. In order to do this, placing authorities, children's residential services, other professionals, and service providers must work together to share information and make sound decisions about the suitability of potential placements. In addition, service providers have a responsibility to consider how the introduction of the new placement might impact upon the safety and wellbeing of young people already living in the service.

Under the provisions of the [Children \(Scotland\) Act 1995](#), 'Looked After Children' are defined as those in the care of their local authority. This guidance refers to children and young people who are looked after away from home, placed in residential services, and those who access short breaks services for overnights. Some children and young people being cared for in residential services in Scotland are placed by local authorities from other parts of the United Kingdom. While legislation in relation to their looked after status is different, the principles, good practice, and provider responsibilities highlighted in this document nevertheless apply. It must be noted that English local authorities have no power to place a non-consenting child (regardless of whether they do or do not have sufficient understanding) in residential accommodation in Scotland, as specified in the provisions of [paragraph 19, Schedule 2 to the Children Act 1989](#).

This guidance sets out the Care Inspectorate's expectations for services to plan for and assess the needs of children and young people before a placement begins, to consider how the needs of individual children and young people will be met. It will support commissioners, planners, purchasers, and providers in offering the best placements for children and young people moving into a new residential setting, and in developing admissions policies and procedures to support positive outcomes for children and young people which comply with legislative requirements and best practice, including the SHANARRI principles of [Getting it Right for Every Child](#) and the [Health and Social Care Standards](#) (see appendix 1). In addition, any consideration of the suitability of placements must consider young people's long term needs, and ensure provision of Continuing Care arrangements as standard practice in line with [Part 11 of the Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#).

2. Making positive decisions for and with children and young people

In order to be in a position to support the best possible decisions about potential placements, service providers should have a clear and realistic view of their current capacity to provide care. A service provider should ensure that the service statement of Aims and Objectives is up to date and that information provided to prospective service users/placing authorities accurately reflects what the service can offer. It should provide clear information about:

- the ethos of the service, underpinning philosophy, values, theories and approaches;
- the location of the service and any specific risks or benefits associated with this;
- the facilities and provisions offered to support and facilitate contact and relationships with family members, friends, previous carers and other significant people in children and young people's lives;
- the availability of appropriate educational provision and the proximity of this to the service;
- specialist services, for example, counselling, psychological services, specific therapies, health care, language support, that are provided in-house and what additional services are available locally either in the public, private or third sector;
- any additional charges for specialist services, the referral process and waiting times for appointments with such services;
- the qualifications, experience and skill-mix of the current staff team, staffing levels and current staff vacancies;
- the arrangements for young people to stay put in Continuing Care arrangements up until the age of 21

3. Considering a new referral – what information should be provided / requested

When considering the referral of a child or young person for admission to a residential placement, the service provider must carry out its own assessment of whether it can meet the needs of the child or young person, and therefore whether the placement is appropriate. *The placing authority must provide certain information, under [The Looked After Children \(Scotland\) Regulations \(2009\) Regulation 35](#)*. The following information, whilst not an exhaustive list, must be provided to / requested by service providers, to support with this assessment:

- Age, ethnicity and religion of the child
- Location of the current carers and reason why a new placement is required
- Date and type of placement required
- Details of the placing authority's expectations concerning the new placement
- Name, workplace and contact details of the social worker
- The legal basis for the current work with the child
- Assessment of needs based on the impact of the child/young person's experiences
- A comprehensive chronology of significant events in the child/young person's life up to the present day
- Prevailing circumstances at the time, including the risks if the young person is not placed
- Details of the young person's personal characteristics, strengths, abilities, likes, talents, aspirations, goals, and resilience
- A care plan setting out any presenting needs or difficulties which need to be addressed by the placement including any matters pertinent to the safety and well-being of the child or young person. This should include a copy of the risk assessment and any previous behaviour management plan
- A plan for any specific health needs, and diagnosis if they have one
- Details of whether the young person can be placed with animals (and any specifics around this)
- A summary of the young person's education to date, and a plan for their future education
- Details of any specific arrangements deemed necessary to maintain the young person's safety and feelings of safety, including details of any concerns about the young person's exposure to child sexual exploitation and up to date risk assessment
- Details of any involvement in offending, outstanding charges, court or panel dates, orders and bail/remand conditions
- History of going missing, or failing to return from free-time or home contact and associated risks
- History of behavioural distress towards others, and whether the young person has needed to be restrained in order to keep them or others safe
- History of sexually harmful behaviours, including predatory sexualised behaviour. Whether they are subject to MAPPA arrangements and what current work is ongoing
- History of self-injurious behaviours or suicidal thoughts/actions
- Details of the services, resources and equipment the child/young person needs in order to meet their health, educational, individual interests, racial, religious/cultural, and linguistic needs

- Identification of important relationships (including connections and relationships from previous care placements), and proposed contact arrangements to facilitate continuity and development of these relationships; practical considerations for young people placed far away from home and how contact, where appropriate, will take place
- Explicit consideration of the anticipated needs of the young person in relation to accommodation post 18

4. Considering a new referral – what service providers should think about

The individuals involved in making placement decisions should ensure that a robust matching process is followed. They should be fully conversant with the needs of the group of young people currently placed in the service, and should take full account of any current staffing or management issues. The service provider should develop a format for recording the matching process and the reasons for decisions which are made. This should include an impact assessment which clearly records the potential risks and benefits for all young people affected by the potential placement. When considering the referral of a child or young person for admission to a residential placement the following information, whilst not an exhaustive list, should be considered by service providers:

- The positives in this potential placement, for both the young person and the existing young people
- What can be offered which will make a difference
- Views of the young person about where they might live
- Proximity and distance from family, friends and people who are important to the young person
- Availability of resources required by the young person in the locality, for example, education, support to travel, time to travel to and from school, availability of specialist health services, etc.
- Contact and advocacy arrangements from the placing authority, including for young people placed from outside Scotland
- Desired outcomes for the young person, and skill mix of staff to help the young person to achieve those outcomes
- Stability and consistency of staff to enable the young person to settle and begin to establish relationships
- Capacity of the service to develop and nurture relationships with the young person; provide love and care; and recognise and respond to any trauma they may have experienced
- Availability of staff numbers and gender mix to meet the needs of the young person and ensure they support the young person appropriately
- Impact of the placement on young people currently living in the service
- Any obvious reasons why a placement should not be made, for example, a young person with risk of sexually harmful behaviour and young people with known vulnerabilities already living in the service

If possible, provider staff should arrange to visit the young person prior to any decision being made. Discussion with the young person and their previous carers will not only assist with the assessment process, but should also support a smoother transition. When supporting the transition, recognition must be given to the fact that the young person is going through a major transition, which is incredibly difficult and often traumatic.

5. Emergency Placements

An emergency placement is due to an unplanned or unexpected move, that was not foreseen by authorities ([Guidance on the Looked After Children \(Scotland\) Regulations 2009 and the Adoption and Children \(Scotland\) Act 2007](#)). In drawing up a statement of aims and objectives, the service provider should consider whether it can provide emergency placements which meet the immediate needs of the young person for safety, security and wellbeing, and at the same time ensure that the needs of the current group of young people continue to be met without undue disruption.¹

There will be times when placements available are not an ideal match for young people who require an emergency admission, and in these circumstances, consideration of a suitable placement should be made to a 'best fit' principle. Acknowledgement must be given to the trauma experienced by children and young people subject to emergency placements, and any approach must be sensitive to, and cognisant of this.

Questions which the service provider should consider are:

- Do we have appropriate accommodation to help a young person in crisis feel safe, at the same time promoting their rights, privacy and dignity?
- Does the lay-out of the building enable us to accommodate young people on an emergency basis without disrupting the young people who already live there?
- Do we have the staffing capacity and staff with the right skills, knowledge and experience to meet the needs and safety of the young person being admitted and our existing young people?

Where children and young people are placed on an emergency basis and a chronology and assessment of the child or young person's needs is not available (for example where a place of safety is required, or the young person has only recently come to the attention of services), the service should request that this is provided by the placing local authority as soon as possible. There is an expectation that in the absence of the level of information which would normally be provided, the receiving service and placing authority make every effort to ensure information is shared which allows the child or young person to have their needs for comfort and security met to the best possible extent.

The local authority has a responsibility in terms of [The Looked After Children \(Scotland\) Regulations \(2009\) Regulation 41](#), to ensure that a review takes place within 72 hours to determine whether the placement continues to be in the best interests of the child. The provider should support the legislation by requesting that a date and time for the review is agreed when the placement takes place. Given that this is seen as best practice, the provider should also agree a review date within this timescale for children being placed from outwith Scotland.

The Care Inspectorate must be informed of the specific plan for young people accommodated on an emergency basis on the same day as the formal 72 hour review. If the young person is to remain in placement then all information outlined

¹ With thanks to the young people from Plenshin Court Residential Children's Unit, who provided their views on disruptive experiences of emergency admissions

above in sections 3 and 4 must be provided and considered; attention must be paid to how the service proposes to manage the impact of additional young people or those out with the registered age range, and a variation requested through the Care Inspectorate eforms system.

Appendix 1 - Health and Social Care Standards directly relevant to admissions

1.17 I can choose from as wide a range of services and providers as possible, which have been planned, commissioned and procured to meet my needs.

1.18 I have time and any necessary assistance to understand the planned care, support, therapy or intervention I will receive, including any costs, before deciding what is right for me.

2.20 If I need or want to move on and start using another service, I will be fully involved in this decision and properly supported throughout this change.

1.19 My care and support meets my needs and is right for me.

3.4 I am confident that the right people are fully informed about my past, including my health and care experience, and any impact this has on me.

3.15 My needs are met by the right number of people.

4.5 If possible, I can visit services and meet the people who would provide my care and support before deciding if it is right for me.

4.12 I receive proper notice and I am involved in finding an alternative if the service I use plans to close or can no longer meet my needs and wishes

4.13 I have enough time and support to plan any move to a new service.

4.14 My care and support is provided in a planned and safe way, including if there is an emergency or unexpected event.

4.17 If I am supported and cared for by a team or more than one organisation, this is well co-ordinated so that I experience consistency and continuity.

4.18 I benefit from different organisations working together and sharing information about me promptly where appropriate, and I understand how my privacy and confidentiality are respected.

4.27 I experience high quality care and support because people have the necessary information and resources.

5.8 I experience a service as near as possible to people who are important to me and my home area if I want this and if it is safe.

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