

Report for: Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee : 15 October 2019

Item number: To be added by the Committee Section

Title: Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children – UASC



Report authorised by : Ann Graham, Director, Children's Services

Lead Officer: Beverley Hendricks, Interim Assistant Director,
tel. 020 8489 7061; Beverley.hendricks@haringey.gov.uk

Ward(s) affected: NA

1. Describe the issue under consideration

- 1.1 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) are children and young people who are seeking asylum in the UK but who have been separated from their parents or carers. While their claim is processed, they are cared for by a local authority usually under s.20 of the 1989 Children's Act.
- 1.2 London boroughs make a huge contribution in taking care of UASC. As of 31 March 2018, London boroughs were looking after 1,500 UASC – a third of unaccompanied children seeking asylum in England – see Appendix.

2. Background information

2.1 Entry into the UK

2.1.1 UASC typically arrive in the UK:

- as Spontaneous Arrivals – most UASC arrive in the UK by their own means and are encountered at their port of entry, at the Asylum Intake Unit in Croydon, or are otherwise encountered by police/social services. The local authority in which the child first presents is normally responsible for their care. This has put disproportionate pressure on some local authorities such as Kent and Hillingdon who have significant ports of entry, and Croydon where the Asylum Intake Unit is based.
- through the Dubs amendment – resettlement of UASC already in France, Greece or Italy. The scheme prioritises children aged 12 and under, at high risk of sexual exploitation, and children of Sudanese or Syrian nationality. Transfer to the UK must be determined to be in the best interest of the child.

- through Dublin III Regulation – children/close family/dependants reuniting to have their asylum claim dealt with together. The local authority is responsible for undertaking family assessments to ensure the placement is suitable. Government guidance is currently ambiguous, but we are expecting a revision to make clear that if a parent or sibling is the connection in question, and if they are not able or willing to take care of the child, then the local authority will have a duty to take them into care.

2.1.2 Refugee children, who do not have to go through the asylum process, also arrive in the UK from the Middle East and North Africa Region under the Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) and will be supported for the first year to resettle in the UK. 300 vulnerable children and family members were supported through the programme in 2018, led by Hertfordshire and Sheffield.

2.2 The Pan London Rota and the National Transfer Scheme (NTS)

2.2.1 The Pan London Rota is an agreement by Directors of Children Services to support equal distribution of UASC 16/17 years old in London. The Rota is a voluntary arrangement and all London local authorities have positively contributed to receiving rota referrals, with exception of those recognised as significant entry points in London or over the NTS threshold. The Pan London Rota is managed by Croydon Council's Permanence 1 Team. Emergency Accommodation is managed by the London Asylum Seekers Consortium, (LASC). The LASC commission and monitor the accommodation and arrange safe transfer and access to emergency medical care if required. They additionally resolve any difficulties and liaise with participating Local authorities as required. Haringey has a relationship with the LASC but like many other Local Authority manages the needs of UASC locally without the need to refer to LASC.

2.2.2 Building on the success of the Pan London Rota model, and in response to growing pressures in London and Kent, the Government introduced the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) on 1st July 2016. The scheme was designed to ensure an even distribution of UASC across LAs nationally. Under the NTS, where an unaccompanied child first presents in a Local Authority which already has over 0.07% UASC to child population, the Local Authority is able to arrange for the transfer of the child. Unlike the Pan London Rota, a child need not be 16/17 years of age. However, the pressures of the demand compounded by logistical and operational challenges meant that the NTS was not as effective and the NTS has not yet provided the national solution to the national challenge of caring for UASC. In recent months, very few children have transferred from London boroughs to other regions through the NTS. A significant proportion of London boroughs are therefore over the 0.07% threshold.

2.2.3 Since 2010, 34,600 UASC have been supported by LAs. There is a substantial shortfall between the funding local government currently receives and the actual cost of caring for UASC. London Councils' research found that, in 2016/17, 19 London boroughs reported a cumulative funding pressure of £11m as a result of having to deliver unfunded responsibilities for UASC. On 8 May 2019 the Immigration Minister announced the intention to increase the funding for UASC to LAs. This change means that local authorities will be paid the same amount

for every UASC that they look after, regardless of the child's age or when they entered the UK. Local authorities will receive £114 for each child every day that they are in their care which equates to over £41,600 per year per child. Based on the number of UASC looked after by local authorities, the increase in funding will total over £30 million per year.

2.2.4 Children's social care is funded through the local government finance settlement and the Home Office contribution is in addition to this funding. The aim of the funding is to:

- simplify the process - and LAs await the outcome of the stakeholder group work to produce a service standard to ensure better prioritisation of cases;
- progress the development of the Safeguarding Strategy.

2.2.5 UASC aged 16 or over currently attract a rate of £71 or £91. According to latest published statistics, over 80% of UASC are aged 16 or over, which in theory means that the vast majority of local authorities will benefit significantly from this uplift.

2.3 New UASC role in London

2.3.1 As part of the above changes a new UASC Strategic Lead for London has been appointed who will operate in all other areas which reflects the fact that London is essentially an exporter and the other regions are importers under the NTS. A central part of this role is to make the NTS work and initial work will focus on the Dubs and VCRS cases and challenges with placements. At present only 20-25 UASC move out of London per quarter and this intensifies the demand in London for placements; only three boroughs are below the 0.07% quota.

2.4 Haringey Picture

This is set out in the attached power point.

3. Contribution to strategic outcomes

People Priority

4. Use of Appendices

Presentation showing data regarding UASC.

5. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985