

Report for: Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee

Item number: To be added by the Committee Section

Title: UASC update

Report

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Ward(s) affected: N/A

1. Describe the issue under consideration

1.1 This report sets out a summary of the support and the Councils duties to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children,(UASC) and refugee young people.

2. Recommendations

2.1 For Members to note.

3. Reasons for decision

N/A

4. Background information

4.1 The Local Authority have a legal duty of care under S20 of the Children Act 1989 to accommodate Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking children under the age of 18 who present themselves as homeless and destitute.

4.2 The Young Adults Service (YAS) have a responsibility to provide secure and suitable accommodation, to undertake statutory visits and maintain contact, provide education and training and support young people through the process of applying for asylum and eventually settled status.

4.3 YAS works with young people between the ages of 16 – 25 years old.

4.4 All the Care plans for children under the age of 18 are reviewed and amended through the Looked After Children's process with their IRO's and other designated professionals from the looked after children's system. On the anniversary of their 18th birthday the plans are assessed and reviewed through pathway plans with their social worker or Personal Advisors.

4.5 Statistical Data – January 2024

4.5.1 We currently have a specialist team that sits within the wider YAS service that are currently allocated 33, 16/17 year olds and 106, 18- 25 year olds who are/were UASC.

4.5.2 Over the last 12 months we have accommodated 29 UASC YP (2 females and 27 males).

4.5.3 Currently Haringey cares for a larger majority of UASC from Afghanistan, Eritrea and Turkey. However, we have a wide representation of young people from; Sudan, Iran, Iraq, Sierra, Senegal, Egypt, Algeria, Congo, Albania, Morocco and Vietnam.

4.5.4 We receive UASC notification through 3 main sources; the National Transfer Scheme (NTS), Pan London Rota (LASC Croydon) and “walk ins”. Haringey is part of the National Rota Scheme that ensures that the distribution of UASC is decided in a more equitable manner to avoid a disproportionate amount of UASC being placed in particular local authorities. All local authorities are assigned a quota for accepting UASC.

4.5.5 Haringey’s full quota is 54 young people aged 16/17, but currently stands at 33 which means we are under quota and expected to accommodate a further 21 young people via NTS and Pan London Rota. What is not easily identifiable from our data is that the numbers do not show that as children are being referred in, they are also aging out. The aging out at 18 remain our responsibility as care leavers. As such there has been a steady increase of UASC young people, approximately 2 per month resulting in the necessity to build in plans to increase staffing capacity of the service by developing another UASC team. This is in order to ensure appropriate and safe caseloads within the service and to maintain and develop our service delivery.

4.5.6 The increase in the presenting UASC has generated pressures with the CSC system. Specifically these are:

- Higher percentage of 16-17 LAC proportionally.
- Higher proportion of male LAC as majority of asylum seekers are male.
- Increased need for foster carers willing and able to work with UASC.

4.6 Accommodation

4.6.1 Our preference and first choice is to place all newly arriving UASC in an in-house foster placement or agency foster placement. According to our data 16/33 young people are placed in foster care with the remaining 16 placed in 24/7 Semi – independent provision, or semi independent with bespoke key working support based on assessed need.

4.6.2 Haringey fostering service have a small number of carers who specialise in UASC young people and although the carers are also approved to take non UASC, the carers have been able to build a specialist knowledge of home office and immigration status issues. As a result the carers preference is UASC. The carers advocate on the young person’s behalf and often accompany the young people to their home office appointment. Carers are able to communicate by using google translate and as a result able to support the young person’s needs.

4.6.3 YAS work closely with our brokerage team to identify the best match and quality placements, using our commissioning to quality assure standards within our placement are suitable and safe.

4.6.4 Post 18 our UAS young people are stepped down from being Children in care, with options to remain with their current carer ideally under Staying put arrangements, if this is suitable and agreed by all parties, or shared accommodation with CauseWay Irish who provide specialist shared accommodation for UASC young people with low to medium needs.

4.6.5 By ensuring our migrant children are placed together we have been able to benefit both from peer support, and being placed together where cultural needs can be met through encouraged psycho social approaches.

4.6.6 When there are no available vacancies with CauseWay Irish the brokerage team will then source shared accommodation, usually with one of our preferred providers who work with other migrant children.

4.6.7 Young people who require more support post 18 will be placed in semi-independent provision with dedicated keywork.

4.6.8 If a UASC young person 18+, receive their leave to remain before 25 they are entitled to bid for their own tenancy in line with our local housing offer for care leavers.

4.7 Financial Implications : accommodation and support

4.7.1 Weekly average rates for in house foster placement for 16/17 are £457.00 per week.

4.7.2 Average approximate cost of an IFA agency foster placement or an Semi independent 24/7 placement is £976 per week.

4.7.3 Step down placement 18+ average between £350- £400. Some cost can be recuperated, if a young person receives Leave to remain and can access state benefits, or enter into employment where they would be expected to contribute to their rent.

4.7.4 Staying put placements = £205.

4.8 Financial implications : Home office Grants to support UASC

4.8.1 The Home Office provide grant supported funding for UASC.

4.8.2 The funding received from the Government does not cover the total costs.

4.8.3 Grant funding from the Home office also ceases at 21 unless the young person remains in Education and the Local Authority holds the financial responsibility for any arising needs up until the age of 25.

4.9 Financial support and entitlement

4.9.1 If living in semi-independent arrangement, as part of our financial offer all young people aged 16/17 are entitled to weekly subsistence of £67.20 per week, £20 per month Clothing, travel support to attend education until they are in receipt of a 16-19 bursary, discretionary payment based on assessment of need, if additional winter clothing is needed for example. They also receive birthday allowance.

4.9.2 At 18 if they have not received leave to remain, we continue to pay £67.20, excluding clothing, until they are granted leave to remain from the Home office and can access universal credit and any welfare benefits they then become eligible for.

4.9.3 Those over 18 are also eligible for the council's annual household support fund allowance which priorities care leavers on low incomes.

4.10 Education

4.10.1 We work closely with our virtual school to ensure that Looked After UASC are prioritised in regard to finding education provision when they are first accommodated.

4.10.2 Their academic attainments are reviewed through Personal Education Plans (PEP's), where there is additional funding for education and through the Looked After Children's process.

4.10.3 Young people out of education are reviewed through the biweekly Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET) panels, where pathways are explored of how we reintroduce young people back into education.

4.10.4 Older Young people, over 18 are reviewed through the monthly YAS Aspirations panel, which consists of a range of training and employment specialists.

4.10.5 Our children and young people also have access to Drive Forward Foundation (funded by DWP) who are a significant partner in ensuring our children and young people are accessing the annual recruitment to Civil Service Internship programs, apprenticeships ring fenced for care leavers and employment. They also have access to Careers advice provided at the service and we have good links with specific education, training and employment charities who work specifically with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people, who recognise and can support to navigate through the specific barriers and challenges our young people can face.

4.10.6 Social workers and Personal Advisors also endeavor to build good working relationships with local colleges to assist where difficulties arise that could result in permanent exclusion due to trauma associated behaviors and misunderstanding and communication through language and cultural barriers.

4.10.7 We currently have 5 UASC attending University (Arden University, Queen Mary, Kingston University and 2 at East London university. They are majoring in Computing, Engineering, Public Health, Medical engineering and HNC engineering.

4.11 Health and Wellbeing

4.11.1 We acknowledge that our young people come with a range of additional needs brought about by the need to seek Asylum in a country that is not their home country and have experienced trauma, displacement, and isolation.

4.11.2 Within the first month of placement our children have a health check up by our Looked After Children Nurse and Doctor and signed up to a local GP surgery.

4.11.3 As well as being able to access resources such as First step wellbeing group, MIND and CAMHS, we offer an exclusive mentoring program provided by Hope for the Young.

4.11.4 Hope for the Young, match specialised trained mentors to work with Refugee and Asylum-seeking young people. They work with young people to improve their self-esteem and confidence, set focused goals, set by the young people themselves so that they are relevant and achievable, for a period of 6 months. They currently work with 8 of our young people, and have increased capacity to work with up to around 10-15 young people.

4.11.5 Where the social workers identify young people with more acute mental health needs, they will refer to organizations such as; Freedom from Torture, Room to heal, Helen Bamber and Baobab.

4.11.6 Baobab, is an organisation that offer Psychotherapy and clinical support to our UASC young people that require more intense and targeted mental health support. They also offer specialist training for Practitioners to support them gaining a better understanding of UASC young people which the team have engaged with.

4.11.7 As part of our local offer to children in care and care leavers, UASC young people can also enjoy free gym membership to Haringey leisure centers, the aspire cinema club and everything the aspire have to offer.

4.12 Staff and Training

4.12.1 We have experienced, skilled, committed Social workers and Personal advisors that understand the nature and the nuances of working with UASC.

4.12.2 Training and equipping staff to extend their knowledge and understanding and improve practice remains a priority.

4.12.3 A small proportion of young people arrive from the Home Office, Age disputed. In the past, Age assessments were commissioned to be undertaken by specialist external independent social workers. But as part of our Service improvement plan, all Senior Practitioners were trained to be able to undertake Merton Compliant Age assessment by the Home Office National Age assessment Board. We now have a trained pool of practitioners that can do age assessment subsequently reducing the cost of external assessors.

4.12.4 Staff also utilize specialist training offered by London Asylum Seeking Consortium on a monthly basis.

4.13 What's working Well?

- Social workers and Personal advisors are committed to and passionate about the work they do with UASC
- Due to our extended duties until 25, we are no longer seeing young people go missing or “underground” due to a negative decision from the Home office. As young people are given more time and support to submit a fresh appeal. As a result, we only have 1 young person who is currently Appeal Rights exhausted.
- Since April 2023 we have successfully placed all young people referred to us via NTS within 5 working days. Subsequently benefiting from the extra funding.
- We have a pool of staff trained in Age assessments.
- We have been able to Broker specialist shared accommodation provided by Causeway Irish. Providing accommodation to 25 young people 18+
- We receive Home office grant funding toward support and accommodation for 16/17 and a reduced contribution towards accommodation cost 18 – 21.
- UASC young people are a priority when it comes to school placements, therefore remain out of education only for limited period of time when they are placed and have access to tuition from the virtual school should the need present.
- Due to the growing population of UASC young people there are plans underway to extend capacity by adding another UASC team. We have an additional team manager in place and two personal advisors creating POD 8.
- We provide a good health and well-being offer to UASC bespoke to their needs, working with Hope for the Young who have an exclusive contract with Haringey and Baobab.
- Despite the complexities and volume of work, morale remains high, and staff remain passionate about the work they do.
- YAS have assigned a worker for No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) connect that can obtain vital information direct from the Home office in regard to the status of Young people who are no recourse to public funds.

4.14 What are we worried about?

- There is a significant reduction in grant funding from the home office when young people turn 18 and support and accommodation costs far exceed the grant funding.
- There is an issue with UASC young people accessing legal Aid immigration Lawyers to represent their cases. This is due the increase volume of asylum cases, they are accepting fewer new cases, which is causing a delay in Young people being able to progress their Asylum claims.
- We currently have 18 UASC young people post 21 who are Not in Education Employment to Training (NEET). This is a result of their status as they are unable to work. We do not receive Home office funding for young people that are 21 and NEET.
- Despite having a trained pool of practitioners to undertake age assessments, the Home Office requirement to complete the age assessments within 28 days restricts our ability to access the grant.
- It is becoming difficult to find foster carers for our 16/17 UASC young people, resulting in Young people being place in semi- independent.

4.15 Next Steps

- Children's Services will launch a Targeted Aspirations panel on the 17/01/23 in Partnership with Hope for the Young to look at creating a more bespoke EET pathway for UASC Young people.
- Work on involving more of UASC in the Engagement and Participation initiative- identifying a UASC Champion
- Commitment from the LA that as Corporate parents, we begin to create work experiences for UASC to build CV's in preparation for when they have a right to work in the UK.

5. Use of Appendices

N/A

6. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

N/A