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|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|
| <b>15 January 2019</b>                                                                            |                             | <b>ITEM: 9</b> |
| <b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>                                                              |                             |                |
| <b>Report on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)</b>                                     |                             |                |
| <b>Wards and communities affected:</b><br>All                                                     | <b>Key Decision:</b><br>N/A |                |
| <b>Report of:</b> Janet Simon, Strategic Lead of Children Looked After,                           |                             |                |
| <b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director of Children and Families |                             |                |
| <b>Accountable Director:</b> Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services            |                             |                |
| <b>This report is Public</b>                                                                      |                             |                |

## **Executive Summary**

This report updates members of the Committee on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking children looked after by Thurrock

### **1. Recommendation(s)**

**1.1 That the members of the Committee review the work of officers in relation to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children presenting to the borough.**

### **2. Introduction and Background**

- 2.1 Unaccompanied Asylum seeking children arrive in the United Kingdom often following a long and dangerous journey where they may have been at risk of various types of abuse and exploitation and which can often leave them traumatised.
- 2.2 Local Authorities across the country have the task of receiving these children, identifying who they are, identifying their specific needs and ensuring that an appropriate support is offered to keep them safe; solidify their legal and immigration status and help them to settle into their new circumstances, move on, achieve and reach their potential.
- 2.3 Given established transport links unaccompanied asylum seeking children are more likely to enter into the country through a limited pool of Local Authorities. Thurrock is one such point of entry due to its geographical location, two established ports and busy motorway services.

- 2.4 The National Transfer Protocol, Version 2, became operational from March 2018 replacing the interim transfer protocol which was published in July 2016: The transfer protocol is intended to ensure that unaccompanied children can access the services and support they need. It is intended to ensure that any participating authority does not face a disproportionate responsibility in accommodating and looking after unaccompanied children pursuant to its duties under parts 3, 4, and 5 of the Children act 1989, simply by virtue of being the point of arrival of a disproportionate number of unaccompanied children.
- 2.5 The scheme is based on the principle that no local authority should be asked to look after more Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) than 0.07% of its total child population, according to the Office for National Statistics' mid-year population estimates. This has since been revised in the Eastern Region with an agreed calculation of 0.06% reducing Thurrock's quota. This quota currently stands at 24 UASC.
- 2.6 At present, unaccompanied looked after children who have not made a claim for asylum are not eligible to be included in the transfer scheme.
- 2.7 **Brief enquiry to age:**
- 2.8 At point of entry all UASC individuals are subject to a brief enquiry to age. This is a brief assessment in accordance with the assessing age guidance. Anyone claiming to be a child but whose physical appearance and demeanour strongly suggests that they are significantly over 18 will be treated from that point onwards as an adult. This is subject to review should any further evidence become available to suggest otherwise. The brief enquiry to age is undertaken by a qualified social worker and with the use of an interpreter.
- 2.9 We are currently liaising with the UASC regional co-ordinator to facilitate training in the New Year. This is aimed at ensuring that we continue to be able to offer a good service to the children that we work with and that there is a consistent approach across the service.
- 2.10 **Age assessments:**
- 2.11 Full Merton compliant age assessments are undertaken on any UASC where there is a dispute about their age. There are currently five Social Workers trained to lead on age assessments. Further Age Assessment training is planned for February 2019 to increase the number of staff across the service to respond promptly to new arrivals who require a full age assessment.
- 2.12 **Current situation:**
- 2.13 There are currently 48 UASC including 16 young people who are missing. There have been 72 spontaneous UASC arrivals in Thurrock since April 1st 2018 as follows:

|           |    |
|-----------|----|
| April     | 06 |
| May       | 00 |
| June      | 01 |
| July      | 16 |
| August    | 19 |
| September | 06 |
| October   | 14 |
| November  | 12 |

**2.14 Transfer timeframes:**

2.15 67 UASC have transferred under the National Transfer Protocols since April 1st 2018. 74 UASC arrived in Thurrock from outside the United Kingdom during this period.

2.16 The agreed target for transfer outs is within 10 days of the submission of the Unique Unaccompanied Child Record (UUCR). In the majority of cases these timescales are adhered to. In cases where this timescale is not met this is escalated to the Assistant Director for liaison with the relevant authority.

**2.17 Missing policy:**

2.18 There are currently 16 missing UASC. Of these 16, 13 are Algerian, 2 Vietnamese and one Iraqi. The length of time missing ranges from 7 days up to one individual who has been missing for 1096 days.

2.19 All missing children are subject to a Strategy Meeting with the Police and other connected professionals. This is subject to reviews at a frequency determined at the Strategy Meeting. The current missing protocols at Thurrock stipulate that all missing children remain open to Looked After processes.

2.20 The Eastern region is formulate an agreed policy across the Region. At present, where a child/young person goes missing prior to the arrangement of transfer within the Region they responsibility remains with the receiving authority.

**2.21 Placements (at the end of November):**

2.22 This is a snapshot within the month, as the numbers will fluctuate as Unaccompanied asylum seeking children/young people enter care and transfer within the Eastern Region throughout each month. There is a higher fluctuation for UASC, which is a reflection of the number of arrivals and the aim to transfer young people within 10 days of referral to other authorities within the Eastern Region.

All UASC are assessed at point of entry to identify the most appropriate placement to meet their needs. Children under 16 years of age are placed in regulated placements as per guidance for looked after children. This is usually

foster care. Thurrock has no UASC in Residential settings. Young people aged 16 – 17 years of age are further assessed for their vulnerabilities and independence skills and may be placed in supported accommodation where it is assessed that this is appropriate to their level of independence and need. This is a decision that is made on an individual case basis.

### 2.23 Supported accommodation

2.24 There are currently 17 UASC placed in supported accommodation placed in the following areas:

- Croydon
- Havering
- Newham
- Redbridge
- Thurrock Council
- Waltham Forest

2.25 The cost of supported accommodation placements for UASC ranges from £600 per week to £1050 per week, which is dependent on, need and support.

|                               | UASC LAC placements    |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| Year to date spend @ Period 7 | £349,504               |
| Grant Income                  | £271,044**             |
| Range of costs                | £600 to £1050 per week |

### 2.26 Foster placements:

2.27 These are currently 15 UASC placed in foster care in the following areas:

- Thurrock
- Enfield
- Havering
- Lambeth
- Newham
- Redbridge

## 3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Due to Thurrock's position geographically and in terms of transport links there is a higher proportion of UASC arrivals than in other local authorities as percentage of the childhood population as identified earlier in this report.

3.2 The arrival of children is unpredictable in nature and children arrive in the area at short notice and require a rapid response in order to ensure that appropriate interventions are in place in a timely way.

- 3.3 We have recently reassessed our duty system across the whole of the Looked After Children service to increase our capacity and flexibility in dealing with these fluctuations in demand.
- 3.4 While arrangements for dispersing these children are well developed across the Eastern Region there can be issues, which cause delay including children going missing prior to transfer; local authorities experiencing difficulties locating placements and transfer and young people becoming settled in their placements making moving them more traumatic and difficult.
- 3.5 Where delay occurs the matter is escalated to Assistant Director level to ensure a robust challenge with the relevant Local Authority.
- 3.6 Brief age assessments can be open to challenge and cause delay.
- 3.7 We are in the process of utilising the expertise of the UASC Regional Co-ordinator in order educate our staff and ensure that there are consistent expectations in relation to this process.
- 3.8 Merton compliant age assessment is a specialised piece of work that requires relevant training.
- 3.9 The relevant training is being extended to staff across the service in February 2019. This will increase our capacity to carry out this work.

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 4.1 Members of the Committee to be informed on the issues and challenges in relation to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. Officers accept there is a real challenge meeting the needs of these children given the volume that arrive in Thurrock from outside of the United Kingdom

#### **5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

- 5.1 None

#### **6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact**

- 6.1 None

#### **7. Implications**

##### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Michelle Hall**  
**Management Accountant**

The cost of supported accommodation placements for UASC ranges from £600 per week to £1050 per week, which is dependent on, need and support.

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## 7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**  
**Deputy Head of Legal, Social Care and Education**

Section 17 Children Act 1989 imposes a general duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need.

Children seeking asylum (UASC) who have no responsible adult to care for them are separated or 'unaccompanied' and are therefore 'in need'. The local authority has a duty to assess such children under section 17 Children Act 1989, and then, almost always, to accommodate them under section 20 Children Act 1989.

## 7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Price**  
**Community Development Officer**

Individual needs of children and young people which include their gender, religion, language and disability are considered. There is also the need to consider risks to children and young people such as sexual exploitation, gang related violence and trafficking.

## 7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

- None

## 8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None

## 9. Appendices to the report

- None

**Report Author:**

Janet Simon

Strategic Lead – Children Looked After