

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Agenda
Item No.

Report of Executive Director,

to

Cabinet

on

14th September 2021

Report prepared by: Steve Cornwall / Laurence Doe

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

Relevant Scrutiny Committee(s):

Cabinet Member: Councillor

Part 1 (Public Agenda Item) / Part 2 (Confidential Agenda Item)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet of the current crisis in Kent and recommend that Cabinet agrees to accept 0.07% (27) of the child population in Southend as Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). This is in line with other local authorities and practice in Southend since 2016.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To formally agree for Southend to take 0.07% (27) UASC of the child population.
- 2.2 Southend to take two UASC per month until we reach 0.07% (27) because of the high numbers of UASC numbers coming in through Kent.
- 2.2 To agree a 1 year temporary funding increase upfront of £122,000 to fund an additional Social Worker post and 2 Personal Assistants to work with the expected increase of UASC children, noting that where additional income will be received for the additional UASC placements, if placement costs can be sustained within the additional income a proportion of this cost will be mitigated.
- 2.2 To note the funding pressures in relation to support and placement cost of UASC and that this position will continue to be closely monitored and reviewed.

3. Background

- 3.1 Previous decisions include on 10th November 2015 Cabinet considered a notice of motion about refugees arriving in Europe referred from Council on 22nd October 2015. On 5th January 2016 Cabinet considered a further notice of motion referred from Council on 10th December 2015 about refugees (The minute refers to the Council reviewing its ability to receive more refugees in the light of further information). Also see report to Cabinet on 19th June 2018 and the corresponding minutes of Cabinet (54) and People Scrutiny Committee on 10th July 2018 (127) re

Syrian refugees (This provided authority for a programme to bring an additional 30 individuals to Southend by 2020) (See Appendices 1,2,3)

- 3.2 The Secretary of State has written to all local authorities requesting support to welcome Afghan Locally Employed Staff who have worked for the United Kingdom and risked their lives alongside British forces in Afghanistan over the past twenty years, and are now relocating to the UK with their families (See Appendix 4)
- 3.3 There is a difficult and ongoing situation in Kent regarding the arrival of migrants. Numbers of migrants have been increasing in record levels over the past few months. This has led to unprecedented numbers of vulnerable young people needing care as UASC. This situation has now created an urgent situation in Kent such that they are no longer able to accept any new children into their care since 17th August 2020 and are being dealt with by the Kent Intake Team (at the port). As a result, the Home Office renewed its request for placement pledges and to consider any further support Southend might be able to offer for transfers from the Southeast (See Appendix 5)
- 3.4 Southend is part of the Eastern Region National Transfer Scheme (NTS) where we are on a regional rota to receive UASC who spontaneously arrive in the Eastern Region. In Southend, we have not had a spontaneous arrival for the past 18 months and have only been asked to take two UASC as the numbers of young people arriving in the Eastern Region has significantly dropped.
- 3.5 Since 2016 Southend has agreed to receive a maximum of 0.07% of the child population in Southend (27 children) as UASC. This percentage is based on the NTS principle that no local authority should be asked to look after more UASC than 0.07% of its total child population. While the 0.07% is not a target, it is used to indicate when a local authority has reached the point where they would not be expected to receive any more UASC. Only Thurrock is at full capacity (0.07%) in the Eastern Region.
- 3.6 We rarely reach 27 UASC, as the vast majority of UASC who come to Southend are 16 or 17 years old and so turn 18 within 12 - 18 months of their arrival. For example, six months ago we were at 51% (13) of the 0.07% and due to eight UASC turning 18 we are now at 18% (5). This means the UASC care leaver population (over 18s) will continue to grow, and we currently have 36 over 18 placements.

4 Other Options

- 4.1 To not offer support to colleagues in Kent and refuse to participate in the national voluntary National Transfer scheme (NTS) - we do not recommend this as we would be neglecting a national responsibility to support vulnerable young people that needs to be shared across all areas. If the voluntary NTS is not successful, then central government may mandate the scheme.
- 4.2 Participate in the voluntary National Transfer Scheme – this option is likely to overtake the offer of support, given the expected numbers awaiting transfer and the fact that there is capacity in Southend and the Eastern Region.

5. Reasons for Recommendations

- 5.1 Southend has a responsibility to support these vulnerable young people and assist our colleagues. Due to the pandemic and that Southend is at the end of the line, we have not received any UASC from the NTS which has resulted in a reduction of our UASC numbers. This means there is some capacity in the system to accommodate taking 20+ UASC.
- 5.2 To be able to manage this influx of UASC as well as supporting them potentially up to the age of 25, will require additional resources by way of a social worker and Personal Advisors (x2)

36. Corporate Implications

6.1 Contribution to the Southend 2050 Road Map

Safe and well

To support mixed communities and personal independence. Young people in all parts of the borough always feel safe and secure, remaining well enough to enjoy fulfilling lives, throughout their lives ensuring that everyone has a home that meets their needs, and we are all effective at protecting and improving the quality of life for the most vulnerable in our community

6.2 Financial Implications

The Home Office provides additional funds to support UASC but it does not meet the full cost of local support. The Home Office currently provides funding of £114 per day per child on under 18 placements for local authorities who are under 0.07% of total child population, or £143 per day per child for local authorities above 0.07% of total child population. If we were to take an UASC from a local authority who is already at 0.07% under the National Transfer Scheme, the higher rate of £143 per day will also be transferred, regardless of the receiving local authorities UASC numbers. The Home Office automatically ceases payment of this the day before the UASC turns 18. UASC care leavers receive £270 per person per week equivalent £38.57 per day.

- 6.3 Even with the increased funds from government to support UASC, we anticipate that there will still remain an overspend which is due to the reduction in home office funding once the UASC becomes 18 but also current placements cost to support which is above home office funding. The current overspend forecast funding pressure on the Council for UASC placements is estimated at the region of £180k after consideration of the already approved Council's own budget of £91k. The current average cost of an under 18 UASC placement and support cost is approx. £906 per week, with home office funding of £798 per week (equivalent £114 per day) leaves a remaining average direct cost to the Council of £108 per week or equivalent approx. £5,600 per annum per child for the current 5 children. The current average cost of an over 18 UASC placement and support cost is £405 per week, with home office funding of £270 per week leaves a remaining direct cost to the Council of £135 per week or equivalent approx. £7,000 per annum per young person for the current 36 young people. We are looking towards mitigating this impact by working with the Home Office to speed up the process of determining the UASC settled status or not, so they have access to wider public funds once they turn 18, such as housing benefit. The concern is that until the young people are given 'leave to remain' status they cannot access public funds and the Local Authority continues to provide financial support. Although the process has been speeded up, due to remote interviews, it can still take months. If the application is

unsuccessful, the UASC must be supported until they are deported which takes on average between 2 – 3 years. We currently have 2 UASC in this process, so we don't receive any home office funding at this time.

6.4 We are developing plans to improve options for care leavers and are developing a community offer to help reduce some pressure on Personal Advisors and social workers. The home office monies received for UASC over 18s has recently been increased but still remains a much lower rate for UASC under 18.

6.5 A temporary funding request is being made for the additional staffing resources required to support an increase in under 18 UASC,. The annual cost for a SW Level 8 is £46k and 2 x PA's level 7 at £38k each is £76k. Total funding is £122k per year which includes on costs. It is hoped that this will be a time limited resource to deal with the immediate issues and challenges at hand and we will review after the first year, and expected the additional income received will part mitigate this additional cost.

6.6 It should be noted that there are some other costs in addition to accommodation and direct financial support e.g., meeting the young people's educational, health and social needs.

6.7 Legal Implications

The Children & Social Work Act 2017 introduced a new duty on local authorities, to provide Personal Adviser (PA) support to all care leavers up to age 25, if they want this support. Under previous legislation, local authorities were required to only provide care leavers with support from a PA until they reach age 21, with that support continuing up to age 25 if a care leaver was engaged in education or training. However, this support was not available to care leavers aged over 21 who were not in education, training, or employment. Given that it is a lot more challenging for young people to access services as an adult, increasingly young people are returning over the age of 21 to access this support.

6.8 People Implications

Currently, the average caseload for the social workers is 12.8. However, at this time of year we always have several Looked After Children (LAC), turning 16 and therefore transferred to the 16+ team. At present there are 30+ LAC in the process of transfer which will increase the average caseload to 18.8. To accommodate the expected influx of UASC will push the average social work caseload over 23.

6.9 Once the LAC turn 18 and become care leavers, they are transferred to Personal Advisor (PA) who will support them potentially up to the age of 25. We are now seeing evidence of steady influx care leavers over the age of 21 requesting services. At present the current average caseload for the PAs (Personal Advisor) is 26. It is anticipated that their caseloads are likely to increase to 35+. To be able to manage this influx of UASC as well as supporting them potentially up to the age of 25, will require additional resources by way of a social worker and Personal Advisors (x2).

6.10 Property Implications

While we do not have capacity for the UASC aged 16-17 in foster placements, there is some capacity (10% vacancy) in semi-independent placements which is often the most suitable option for UASC. Southend-on-Sea Borough Council has an established a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) for placing young Care Leavers

into supported accommodation. As these placements are unregulated by Ofsted or CQC, the Council is undertaking a range of checks to ensure that there are no risks to our young people at the time of placement.

6.11 Through the establishment of our DPS we have a list of 'approved' providers whom we have vetted and assessed to assure ourselves of the quality of their support provision, accommodation, and their ability to support our young people to achieve their desired goals and outcomes. We have also sought assurances from these approved providers of their adherence to health and safety, quality assurance, safe recruitment and safeguarding policies and procedures.

6.12 There are also property implications as UASC turn 18 as they still require a form of supported accommodation and then as they leave this accommodation require permanent housing solutions.

6.13 Consultation
N/A

6.14 Equalities and Diversity Implications
The social work staff receive ongoing training as well as working with community groups to ensure that they are better able to meet the diverse needs of the UASC and to integrate them in the local community.

6.15 Risk Assessment
Southend acknowledges that UASC are extremely vulnerable young people who have suffered tremendous hardship from war torn countries, organised crime groups, modern slavery and child sexual exploitation and agree that we must offer support. We have a responsibility to support these vulnerable young people and assist our colleagues. Should we fail to do so there is a reputational risk with the local community, faith groups and Government.

6.16 Value for Money
Support funding for the UASC is through the Home Office, and we can only continue to try and reduce any additional costs to the Council. Once the Home Office has decided their status by processing their leave to remain applications, they can claim Universal Credit and Housing benefit which they will receive at a higher rate and this substantially reduces the cost to the Council.

6.17 Community Safety Implications
There are challenges not only integrating the UASC into the community and the culture, but also the use of a couple of semi-independent provision which has drawn some criticisms from neighbours.

6.18 Environmental Impact
None specifically

7. Background Papers

N/A

8. Appendices

Previous Cabinet Minutes – A1, A2, A3
Afghan LES Relocation Scheme Acceleration – A4
Urgent National Support to Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children – A5