

## **LGA Asylum, Refugee and Migration Task Group update**

### **Purpose of report**

For information.

### **Summary**

Members to note the update from the LGA Asylum, Refugee and Migration Task Group update.

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An update on the work of the LGA Asylum, Refugee and Migration Task Group was sent to the Board on behalf of Cllr Gillian Ford in early February 2019. As notified, Cllr Ford will be attending a Task Group meeting with the Minister for Immigration on Wednesday 6 March, with funding for support for unaccompanied children and care leavers on the agenda. An verbal update on the outcome of this meeting will be provided to the CYP Board on 12 March. A LGA press release on 21 February on the issue in advance of the meeting received extensive coverage, and is available at: [www.local.gov.uk/about/news/lga-spend-asylum-seeking-children-doubles-four-years](http://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/lga-spend-asylum-seeking-children-doubles-four-years).

A copy of the February update is provided below for information:

The LGA Asylum, Refugee and Migration Task Group, chaired by Cllr David Simmonds, reports to both the Children and Young People Board and the Community Wellbeing Board. The meeting is made up of regional member representatives from across the UK, and officer representatives from Regional Strategic Migration Partnerships, with each Group making nominations for four LGA representatives on the Group.

A Task Group meeting was held with the Immigration Minister in November 2018 with a focus on [concerns](#) delivering better [engagement](#) with and funding for councils as part of the new contracts for accommodation and advice for asylum seeking adults and families. It also flagged ongoing concerns around the lack of funding for unaccompanied children (UASC) and those leaving care, including a [session](#) at the 2018 NCASC conference. The Task Group will meet with the Minister again in March and we will continue to press for an uplift in funding as part of an ongoing Home Office led review, as well as the need to work with national partners on identifying and resolving some of the challenges as part of the National Transfer Scheme.

Cllr David Simmonds, Chairman of the LGA Asylum, Refugee and Migration Task Group [flagged](#) to the Home Affairs Committee on 20 November that the total number of UASC is now 4,480 (down from 4,690 last year) in 97% of English councils. The number of UASC care leavers (aged 17-21) has gone from 4,660 in 2016 to 7,130 in 2018. The increase in the younger age group reflects the large number of 16/17 year olds who came over in the past couple of years. The figure for UASC care leavers under 18 has almost doubled from 1310 in 2016 to 2570 in 2018, with some councils and regions supporting more care leavers than UASC.

We have long urged government to put in place long-term funding arrangements to support growing pressures on councils, communities and the children themselves. An ADCS survey shows that funding rates only cover on average 50% of the cost of support, and LGA analysis has found that councils in England spent £152 million on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in care in 2017/18 – an increase of 95 per cent on the £77 million spent in 2014/15.

The challenges faced by councils in ensuring that the needs of children can be met are not just financial but also relate to access to wider services which ensure that needs of new arrivals can be met effectively. These include access to support for mental health and wellbeing, effective legal advice, school places, places to learn English, and translation services. Looked after children are four times more likely to experience mental health issues than their peers and we are hearing increasing concerns from councils around lack of access to therapeutic services for this cohort. We need a conversation across government and with other partners to enable more effective access to these.

We have also heard of growing concerns around challenges around quick and accurate decision making on asylum claims. The LGA welcomed recent announcements around ‘Dubs and Calais’ leave as the recognition of the importance of children knowing their future. The use of asylum leave for 18% of spontaneous arrivals is widely acknowledged to have a detrimental impact on children. A further 30% of UASC applicants are refused. There is a need to do more work on supporting social workers and others working with children whose future may not be in the UK. We are also aware of ongoing concerns around the need for a more effective age assessment and have indicated the wish to work with government to get this right for both those in the children’s and adults system. We are also working with government to clarify the roles and responsibilities of councils in supporting children in their care through the EU Settlement [Scheme](#), building on the learning from pilot areas.

Cllr Simmonds met with Lord Dubs on 15 January to discuss a letter to local leaders to pledge support for the resettlement of 10,000 refugee children, as part of a campaign from Safe Passage. It was agreed that joint work would be undertaken to further clarify a call for future schemes to build on the support local authorities already have shown for both unaccompanied children and children in families. It was confirmed that the campaign will to

continue to call for full funding for councils and better access to key services such as mental health.

Councils have a strong track record in welcoming and integrating asylum seeking children. In addition, councils also directly support children in families through the resettlement schemes, and care leavers and children in destitute families without recourse to public funds. Councils and their partners also continue to work hard to support the many programmes for refugees and asylum seekers of all ages currently in operation. The Task Group will continue to press for greater alignment of these programmes so any new arrivals' needs can be met and funded, without creating unsustainable pressure on local services, alongside better, real-time information.

Resources and information to support councils on the range of programmes councils may be involved in continue to be provided on the LGA [website](#). A further update will be provided at the next Children and Young People Board meeting.