

29 June 2016

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

Purpose

For information.

Summary

This paper updates members on current progress in establishing a future resettlement scheme for unaccompanied asylum seeking children, children deemed at risk from countries around Syria and children from other European countries into the UK.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note the current activity taking place to support local work with unaccompanied asylum seeking children, and to advise on any further points for the LGA to raise as part of our ongoing discussions with government.

Action

Officers to take action as directed by members.

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Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

National transfer of unaccompanied asylum seeking children

1. The LGA has welcomed the government's announcement of a co-ordinated national mechanism to ensure that unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) are placed more fairly across the country, with better access to the services and support that they need. We are currently working with the government and partners on the detail of how the scheme will operate, seeking to build on existing infrastructure and using a sector led approach to share knowledge and best practice.
2. The new scheme will be built on each region taking a proportion of UASC in relation to their current child population, with no region expected to have in excess of 0.07 per cent. More information on what this will mean for individual local authorities should be released shortly. The scheme will take into account existing populations, and individual local authorities can take more or less if agreed regionally. The Immigration Act gives local authorities the power to transfer case responsibility for children to other councils around the country, and government is currently developing a protocol and guidance to inform the transfer process.
3. The transfer system will be built regionally. Government see existing Regional Strategic Migration Partnership (RSMPs) having a key role in facilitating transfers. In the short term, RSMPs will be facilitating regional conversations about the new arrangements, alongside the Association of Directors of Children's Services. Government expect that the first transfers as part of the scheme will begin on 1 July.
4. Regional Strategic Migration Partnerships perform a valuable source of support, advice and co-ordination in relation to adult refugees and families, and we are currently seeking additional government funding to allow them to perform a similar role for children and to enable discussions on local authorities' capacity to support the new scheme.
5. From 1 July until 31 March 2017, local authorities will receive enhanced daily rates for UASC transferred under the new scheme: £114 for under 16 year olds, £91 for 16-17 year olds and £200 for former UASC leaving care. The current daily rates are £95 for under 16 year olds, £71 for 16 - 17 year olds and local authorities supporting more than 25 former UASC care leavers receive £150 per week. Revised grant instructions will be issued shortly.

Supporting Kent

6. Given the significant impact on their services, local authorities can assist Kent in advance of the introduction of the transfer scheme.
7. Any local authority taking responsibility for children from Kent will receive the enhanced funding rate, and these transfers will count towards the 0.07% threshold. This existing

cohort of children have already undergone a range of assessments, and Kent are therefore able to provide a package of supporting information to receiving authorities. This should allow those authorities which voluntarily support Kent prior to 1 July to better understand the specific needs of those children and young people transferred into their care. This level of information is unlikely to be available for new arrivals from 1 July.

Unaccompanied children from Europe and around Syria

8. The Minister announced on 21 April that an additional 3,000 "children at risk" and their families would be resettled in the UK from the Middle East and North Africa over the lifetime of this Parliament, with the same funding levels as the current Syrian scheme. It is expected that only a small number of this cohort will be unaccompanied children.
9. Separately, the government announced on 4 May that it will resettle unaccompanied children currently based in other European countries into the UK, with the number of children supported under this scheme to be agreed in partnership with local authorities.
10. Again, local authorities have been asked to consider whether they would be able to settle unaccompanied refugee and asylum seeking children under these schemes, with Regional Strategic Migration Partnerships leading regional discussions.
11. Our priority is to ensure that these arrangements are designed in the best interests of children and young people, and that local services have the capacity to meet their needs. The LGA is working with government and other partners to provide more detail of funding, process and timescales for these separate schemes as a matter of urgency. The Home Office will write to all councils with further information including long-term funding arrangements.

Current LGA activity

12. As the Government seeks to develop and roll out these new arrangements, the LGA is seeking to ensure that these new arrangements are designed in the best interests of children and young people, and that local services have the capacity to meet their needs. The LGA is working with government and other partners to provide more detail of funding, process and timescales as a matter of urgency.
13. The member-led LGA Asylum, Refugee and Migration Task Group is made up of regional member and officer representation covering all of the English regions, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland. Chaired by Cllr David Simmonds, it focuses upon the issues around the asylum, refugee and migration agenda from a local government perspective. The Task Group has been involved in discussions with Government and with regions for a long period of time on how to work together to deliver on programmes supporting asylum seekers and refugees. The LGA, via the Task Group, will continue to work with Ministers as the scheme develops and will provide update reports to the Children and Young People Board as appropriate.

14. The Task Group is also working with government and partners to clarify what the current range of resettlement schemes will look like in practice. The LGA view is that better aligned, regionally coordinated programmes can meet the needs of vulnerable children and families more quickly, address any capacity issues in local authorities, and effectively utilise central, regional and local governments' strategic and operational expertise and innovative practice.

Recommendation

15. Members are asked to note the current activity taking place to support local work with unaccompanied asylum seeking children, and to advise on any further points for the LGA to raise as part of our ongoing discussions with government.

Financial implications

16. There are no specific additional financial implications for the LGA arising from this report.