

Committees: Community and Children's Services Policy and Resources	Dates: 8 May 2019 6 June 2019
Subject: Request for additional support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children	Public
Report of: Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children's Services	For Decision
Report author: Simon Cribbens, Assistant Director – Commissioning and Partnerships	

Summary

The City of London Corporation has been asked to make a pledge of additional resettlement support and accommodation to unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children. The City Corporation already exceeds the level of support for this group that is expected of local authorities. As such, officers recommended to Members that the City Corporation does not pledge additional support and resources at this point.

Recommendations

Members of Community and Children's Services are asked to:

- note the request to support the Our Turn campaign to provide for additional unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children
- note the significant level of support provided by the City Corporation to this group, and the Corporation's ongoing commitment to meet these obligations
- to decide to either resettle additional children and seek funding from the City Corporation to do so, or to endorse the recommendation of officers not to support the Our Turn campaign at this time, and not to resettle additional children and young people as part of it.

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Main Report

Background

1. The Our Turn campaign seeks to resettle 10,000 unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children in the UK and is led by the organisation Safe Passage, working in partnership with the Alf Dubs Children's Fund.
2. The City of London Corporation has been asked to support the campaign by calling on Government to:
 - agree to a resettlement target of 10,000 children at risk over a 10-year period from Europe and conflict regions across the world
 - ensure that children granted protection in Britain have the support to rebuild their lives.
3. To deliver such a pledge will require all local authorities to provide additional resettlement and ongoing support for these children year on year. As such, the City Corporation has been further asked to commit to support an additional number of unaccompanied children.
4. The assistance requested is in addition to existing statutory duties, and to the Government's commitment to a package of support to provide resettlement in the UK for 480 unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children.
5. The City Corporation is currently providing statutory care to 23 looked-after unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and ongoing support to a further 22 young people who have left care, but who entered services as UASC, as at 18 April 2019.

Current Position – UASC

6. Local authorities already have a duty to protect and support UASC as soon as a child is referred to a local authority or is found in the local authority area. These are children and young people who are seeking asylum in the UK, but who have been separated from their parents or carers.
7. The care provided by a local authority can be for several years and typically includes providing a child with accommodation, education and social work support while in care and as a care leaver.
8. UASC arrive in the UK in the following ways:
 - **Spontaneous arrivals:** most UASC arrive in the UK by their own means and are encountered at their port of entry or by police/social services. The local authority in which the child first presents is normally responsible for their care.
 - **Section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 (commonly known as the Dubs amendment) resettlement:** this allows for UASC already in European refugee camps to transfer to the UK. The Government has currently committed to accept 480 such children.
 - **The Vulnerable Persons and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme:** this mostly resettles children with their families, although a small number of UASC are housed through this scheme.

- **Dublin III regulation:** this reunites children claiming asylum who have an identified family member within the UK.
9. The largest majority of UASC are those that have spontaneously presented in the UK. They have very similar characteristics to children who enter the UK through the Dubs amendment in terms of their age and reasons for seeking asylum.

Current Position – Distribution

10. In order to fairly distribute the additional demand on services and budgets required to support such children and young people, London local authorities operate the Pan London Rota for allocation. This has achieved a more equitable distribution of responsibility between London's local authorities. However, this rota does not impact on the imbalance between London and other regions.
11. In response to the uneven distribution of children needing care, the Home Office introduced the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) in July 2016. The NTS is designed to ensure that no local authority is required to care for more UASC than it can cope with (determined by Government to be 0.07% of the child population). Where such a threshold has been met, the scheme expects an authority to arrange for the transfer of the child to another authority. Where the region (in this case, London) is above the 0.07% threshold, such a transfer would be to another region through the NTS.
12. As of March 2019, all London local authorities reported that they were caring for more UASCs than 0.07% of their total child population. Many London authorities far exceed this threshold – including the City Corporation and those authorities where it has housing stock. London is responsible for more than 1,500 UASC – around a third of the overall population in England – and this proportion is rising.
13. In practice, the NTS is not working effectively. There are around 140 children currently awaiting transfers from entry local authorities. Some councils outside of London have stopped receiving any UASC pending the outcome of a Home Office review of funding. The current funding from Government supporting the resettlement of UASC falls short of the total cost to authorities.
14. Members should note that the Government's commitment to resettle an additional 480 children as part of the Dubs amendment already relies on additional local authority support and that, despite the pledges of many, they have yet to meet this target.

Current Position – City of London Corporation

15. As of 15 April, the City of London is looking after 23 UASC. This equates to 1.89% of the overall child population or 27 times the Government's maximum expectations. This is the highest rate of any local authority in the UK – and continues to increase.

16. In addition, the City of London supports 22 care leavers who were formerly UASC. In 2016, it provided homes to two Syrian families under the Vulnerable Persons Scheme.
17. In response to the additional budgetary and resource pressures related to the growing number of UASC supported by the Department of Community and Children's Services (DCCS), Members agreed a £232,000 uplift in its baseline budget from 2017/18 onwards.
18. The Department's budget to support UASC in 2019/20 is £795,000 against which it will receive only £264,000 in Government grant for this purpose. A child or young person in the long-term care of the City Corporation typically costs in excess of £50,000 per annum.
19. The City Corporation is a committed corporate parent to the children it looks after and those who it supports who have left care. In support of this duty, the DCCS invests significantly in the housing, care, health and education of these children and young people. It remains committed to supporting the Pan London Rota system, and will continue to provide emergency support to UASC who present locally.

Proposals

20. The DCCS recognises the vital role that local authorities play in supporting vulnerable unaccompanied children. However, this has resulted in significant financial pressures. Officers consider that any undertaking to accept more children, whether by the City Corporation, or other local authorities, should be accompanied by a commitment from Government to meet the full cost of support, and ensure the fair distribution of responsibility.
21. Therefore, while officers support the principle of the Our Turn campaign, they feel it needs to be clearer in its call on Government, so as not to create unfunded or undeliverable commitments.
22. Officers further note that the City Corporation has already provided significantly above the expected level of provision by local authorities. Given the size of the department's Social Work and Commissioning teams, a further commitment would not be viable without significant additional investment. It is therefore proposed that Members do not pledge to provide additional support to UASC as part of this campaign at this time.
23. Members may wish to note that the Home Office has committed to a review of funding for UASC. Should such a review deliver a package of full cost recovery for meeting additional need, the City Corporation may wish to reassess its ability to provide additional support.

Conclusion

24. The City Corporation is committed to supporting those children and young people it provides care to – the vast majority of whom are UASC. It provides for many

more children than the Government's recommended threshold for local authorities, and invests significant resources to ensure that those in its care receive the housing, education and care they require.

Appendices

- None

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