

Education, Children and Families Committee

10.00, Tuesday, 12 December 2017

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

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Executive/routine	
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Executive Summary

This report highlights the increased number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children who have arrived in Edinburgh during 2016 and 2017 and describes our approaches to assessing, supporting and accommodating them. The Committee is asked to note the budget pressure associated with this increased number of children, the actions we are taking in mitigation and to request that future reports on the Looked After Child population include data on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) in Edinburgh and our strategies to support them and manage service demand.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 To note the increased demand relating to arrivals of UASC in Edinburgh in 2016 and 2017 and the associated budget pressures within Children's Services.
- 1.2 To note the actions in place to develop alternative options for accommodation of young people.
- 1.3 To request that future reports on LAAC transformation include a section containing data on UASC and progress made in relation to strategies for managing demand for service.
- 1.4 To note that the Council is working with COSLA to make representation to the Home Office regarding level of government funding for UASC.

2. Background

Definition

- 2.1 The numbers of UASC in Edinburgh tended to be low until 2016. Since January 2016, the number has grown significantly as detailed in appendix 1.
- 2.2 UASC are children or young people under the age of 18 who are outside their country of origin to seek asylum in the United Kingdom, are separated from parents and relatives, and are not in the care of someone who is responsible for doing so.
- 2.3 It is the responsibility of local authorities to look after any UASCs in their local authority area. UASC are treated as looked after and accommodated children (LAAC) under section 25 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995.
- 2.4 The numbers of UASC entering the United Kingdom varies from year to year. In 2016, 3175 UASC entered the United Kingdom, compared with 3451 in 2006 and 1149 in 2011.
- 2.5 This report provides an overview of the approach the City of Edinburgh Council has taken in response to the increase.

3. Main report

The Edinburgh Approach

- 3.1 Since 2010 the City of Edinburgh Council has been operating under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Border Force at Edinburgh Airport to ensure that any young person discovered arriving unaccompanied at the airport is quickly transferred to local authority care and when there is any reasonable suspicion that a person may be under 18 that an age assessment is carried out as soon as possible by a Council social worker.
- 3.2 During 2017 the City of Edinburgh (MOU) with Border Force was expanded to include Fife Council, Midlothian Council, East Lothian Council. The MOU was also expanded to cover all ports of entries covered by Border Force in the combined area of the four local authorities and UK Immigration Enforcement who operate inside the United Kingdom.
- 3.3 All young people who arrive in the City are treated as potential victims of trafficking (PVOT). An inter-agency child protection initial referral discussion (IRD) is always undertaken involving police, social work and health professionals, to share information and agree actions that will help protect the young person and attempt to identify any perpetrators involved in human trafficking or exploitation.
- 3.4 Currently there are 42 UASC supported by the City of Edinburgh of which 32 arrived during 2016 and 2017. The table below provides a breakdown of data relating to each.

Legal/Accommodation status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 are under 18 years of age <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 29 are LAAC - 1 with private foster carers (extended family) • 14 are now over 18 years of age <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3 remain LAAC (1 YPC, 2 foster care) - 1 adopted - 8 are in supported or independent accommodation - 2 no longer in contact with CEC
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 female • 28 male
Arrival	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 young people transferred direct from France • 39 were discovered in Edinburgh
Current placement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19 in Young People's Centre • 11 in foster care • 1 private foster care • 1 is in a hostel • 1 is in custody • 1 with adoptive family • 8 in supported or independent accommodation

	<p>(NB 7 have gained temporary leave to remain and have access to benefits for their accommodation costs. The other 1 paid for by CEC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 no longer in contact with CEC
Country of Origin	<p>Exact number from each country (other than Vietnam) not given, as small numbers mean that disclosure may breach privacy rights.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Afghanistan < 5 • Albania <5 • Bangladesh <5 • Eritrea <5 • Ethiopia <5 • Gambia <5 • Iran <5 • Morocco <5 • Somalia <5 • Sudan <5 • Tanzania <5 • Vietnam 24

Reasons for unaccompanied children seeking asylum and pattern of arrival

- 3.5 UASC leave their country of origin for a range of reasons. They may have travelled because they are no longer safe due to conflict, political instability or other factors.
- 3.6 They may be potential victims of human trafficking (PVOT) and they undertake long and difficult journeys to get to the UK.
- 3.7 Intelligence on trafficking is scarce across Scotland and across the UK.
- 3.8 The majority of UASC arriving in Edinburgh in 2016 and 2017 have been young people of Vietnamese origin.
- 3.9 Typically, they are not found at the airport or the local national border, but arrive in the city having crossed the UK border elsewhere at unknown locations, and are found unaccompanied in the city centre. Some have been found working illegally in various locations.
- 3.10 Standard Child Protection processes, typically taking place shortly after they are found, are generating little by the way of reliable information on the routes and means by which they have travelled to Edinburgh. Council officers are working closely with Police Scotland colleagues to develop our joint approaches to our engagement with these young people to generate more reliable information.
- 3.11 Police Scotland colleagues in Edinburgh are collating information on these young people and are drawing on Police Scotland National Human Trafficking Unit expertise to commission analysis on the situation both locally and nationally. Additionally, they are working jointly with the National Crime Agency, Home Office Immigration Enforcement and UK Border Force to share information, develop the intelligence picture locally and better inform our tactics in responding to this

challenge, to better understand the problem and better support these vulnerable young people.

Accommodation and costings

- 3.12 All young people under the age of 18 are treated as looked after and accommodated children (LAAC) on arrival in our city.
- 3.13 We do so under section 25 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 which states that:
- (1) A local authority shall provide accommodation for any child who, residing or having been found within their area, appears to them to require such provision because:
- (a) no-one has parental responsibility for him;
 - (b) he is lost or abandoned; or
 - (c) the person who has been caring for him is prevented, whether or not permanently and for whatever reason, from providing him with suitable accommodation or care.
- 3.14 Young people arriving unexpectedly in the city tend to be accommodated initially in our children's residential units. Reasons for this include that a) there is not typically a foster placement available for a teenager at short notice b) the age of the young person and their needs/risks have not yet been assessed c) they may not speak English.
- 3.15 The table below shows the relative costs of care placements.

Placement type	Direct unit cost pa
In-house foster care	£26K
Supported accommodation	£36K
Purchased foster care	£46K
Young people's centres and close support	£120K - £170K
Residential schools	£100K - £310K
Secure Care	£295K

- 3.16 The Home Office will reimburse local authorities to some extent for the service they provide to UASC. However, the maximum per UASC is £41.6K for an under 16 year old and £33.2K for a 16-17 year old. This decreases to £10.4K when they reach age 18.

- 3.17 The cost of placement in a YPC is therefore more than three times the rate of Home Office reimbursement
- 3.18 The total number of residential units in Edinburgh is nine, each providing beds for between five and eight young people at any one time. The current situation has contributed to a dearth of available beds in Edinburgh residential units.
- 3.19 Child plans for each young person will be agreed on an individual basis depending on the level of need and risk they present. If a child is assessed as continuing to need residential care that placement will continue for as long as needed. However, assessments of some UASCs currently placed in residential are that their needs can appropriately be met using other forms of accommodation.

Alternative accommodation plans

- 3.20 In August 2017 the Council launched a recruitment drive specifically for host families willing to accommodate UASC, particularly those over age 16. As a result, we have six families undergoing assessment who, if and when approved, will be recruited to accommodate either new arrivals or to provide an exit placement for young people currently accommodated in YPCs who do not need the intensive level of support provided in residential care.
- 3.21 In addition, Council officers are working on an alternative model which will involve leasing shared flats or other accommodation which will be used to accommodate UASC with visiting support. We are currently assessing which combinations of young people can best be accommodated in this way.
- 3.22 Through these alternative plans for UASC, we aim to put less pressure on places within our residential units and bring down what has become a budget pressure of around £2m on purchased residential care.

Other support to UASC

- 3.23 Our Additional Support for Learning Service has been heavily involved with UASC in Edinburgh given that they almost always need support in English for speakers of other languages and may also have other additional support needs.
- 3.24 The young people have usually managed to be integrated into mainstream schools in the city with additional support, and those who are approaching school leaving date, or who have left, have been connected to positive destinations notably Edinburgh College.
- 3.25 Young people, where appropriate, have been supported to attend places of worship and other community groups.

4. Measures of success

- 4.1 Number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children who are accommodated in placements proportionate to individual need and risk.
- 4.2 Budget pressures managed within Communities and Families.

5. Financial impact

- 5.1 The current estimated annual cost of supporting UASC's is £2.67m which is partially offset by income from the Home Office of £1m resulting in a net pressure of £1.67m. This is based on costs and income relating to 31 UASC's with 28 aged under 18 and 3 aged 18 and over.
- 5.2 The net cost of £1.67m would increase over time if the current placements are maintained as income reduces significantly as the children reach ages 16 and 18 respectively as detailed in 3.17 above.
- 5.3 As set out in 3.21 and 3.22 above actions are in place to identify alternative forms of support to reduce the number of placements in YPC's. The current options being progressed, which include shared and individual accommodation and host families, can be provided within the funding provided by the Home Office for UASC's under 18 years of age.
- 5.4 The Council's financial planning assumptions for 2018/19 provide an additional £1m of funding to address the above pressures. Taken together with the anticipated reduction in residential costs as a result of the alternative supports being progressed this is deemed to be sufficient to support the current number of UASC's.

6. Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

- 6.1 Due to the uncertainty in being able to predict the future number of new cases and the placements that will be available to support them at the time they arrive there is a risk that additional pressures may arise. The service will continue to monitor the impact and report this through the relevant reports to Finance and Resources Committee, Education, Children and Families committee and Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee.

7. Equalities impact

- 7.1 Individual child planning will mean that services offered are tailored to the need and risk presented by each child or young person to mitigate against risk of inequality for any individual.

8. Sustainability impact

- 8.1 There are no direct sustainability implications arising from this report.

9. Consultation and engagement

- 9.1 The service is engaging fully with the Scottish Government and relevant agencies in relation to both local and national arrangements. Issues highlighted from this report will inform discussion by Elected members via COSLA.

10. Background reading/external references

- 10.1 [Annual Review of Services for Looked After and Accommodated Children- Report to Education, Children and Families Committee 8 December 2015](#)
- 10.2 [Looked After Children: Transformational Programme Progress Report – Education, Children and Families Committee 15 August 2017](#)

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11. Appendices

1. Numbers of UASC in Edinburgh by calendar year.

Numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) who began to be accommodated by the City of Edinburgh Council by calendar year. All found in the city or arriving at the airport unless otherwise stated.

Year	Number of UASC
2009	1
2010	0
2011	3
2012	1
2013	1
2014	2
2015	2
2016	14 (includes 9 discovered in the city and 5 we transferred direct from France)
2017	16 so far (from 1 January to 17 October 2017)

The looked after children (LAC) transformation programme is a five year programme which commenced in 2013 and will be entering its final year.

Progress was last reported to the Education, Children and Families Committee in 15 August 2017. Many of the targets had been achieved or exceeded. These included an overall reduction in the LAC population; a reduction in the number of children in foster care; an increase in kinship care placements; and a reduction in the use of secure care.

The service was behind target to reduce the percentage of independent foster placements and reduce use of residential care placements although significant progress had been made since 2013. Analysis of national benchmarking information indicated that this was unlikely to be achieved within timescale. These pressures were taken into account by the Council during the budget setting process for 2017-18.

As a result, the service is in the process of developing a new strategy and targets to continue to reduce the need for children to become looked after taking into account factors such as the rising child population, the implications of implementing Self Directed Support and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and the increases in Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.