

Report to the Bristol Corporate Parenting Panel

Report Title: Unaccompanied Children and Young People:
Corporate Parenting Panel Briefing

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Purpose of the report

- To appraise Corporate Parenting Panel of the current position in relation to caring for and supporting unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people in the City
- To appraise Corporate Parenting panel of the national and regional context of caring for and supporting unaccompanied children and young people, including financial support, anticipated demand and legislative and policy developments
- To note the response of the community in Bristol in wanting to respond to the needs of unaccompanied children and young people coming to the City

Introduction and context

Bristol has cared for and supported unaccompanied children arriving in the city and seeking asylum since the early 1990s when children and young people travelled to the UK escaping conflict in Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia. Since that time, children and young people have presented in the city with increasing frequency and from a variety of countries of origin escaping conflicts in Afghanistan, the Middle East and Africa.

There are three groups of unaccompanied children who arrive in the city:

- Spontaneous arrivals are those who first present once they have arrived in Bristol
- Those accepted through the National Transfer Scheme which is administered by South West Councils coordinate the Regional Strategic Migration Partnership of Local Authorities in the region. This is the mechanism by which children and young people, who have arrived in Kent or other areas where there is a higher than average ratio¹ of unaccompanied children to total child population, are relocated across councils in England. Local Authorities work on a voluntary and in this region, rota'd, basis to accept children through the national scheme.
- Those accepted from Europe and the camps in Northern France or elsewhere (often referred to as 'Dubs' children).

Upon arrival in Bristol or the UK, for those coming from European Camps or through the National Dispersal Scheme, an initial interview and age assessment is undertaken to determine the child or young person's age. Those reporting and initially assessed as under 18 become looked after children under Section 20 of Children Act 1989 and a placement found that is best able to meet their needs. The child or young person will then receive all the support and services provided to children in our care whilst the full age assessment is completed. This is generally a time of uncertainty for young people as most are aged 15-17, have poor English and little understanding of the looked after

¹ No region is expected to have in excess of 0.07% in relation to their current total child population with each region expected to increase their numbers to this threshold where appropriate. The ratio does not include children leaving care or out of area placements, with the plan that the transfer scheme will be used to enable out of area placements to be transferred to the host authorities where this is mutually agreed.

children's system in the UK. Use is made of translation services to help us, the young person and carers or others understand what's happening and what's needed.

In addition to the looked after children system, unaccompanied young people are required to negotiate the Immigration system. They will be given leave to remain in this country on a discretionary or permanent basis.

At age 18, unaccompanied children who have leave to remain or who are appealing against the end of their leave to remain will become Former Relevant Care Leavers provided with the full range of support and services available to all care leavers. Pathway Planning with such young people is complex as it must incorporate plans to stay in the UK alongside the possibility of departure from the UK and must include support for legal and Home Office requirements alongside the support required for the young person to develop the skills for a successful adulthood.

For those whose appeal rights have ended however, the Immigration Act 2016 removed all rights under the Children Act. The expectation is that these young people will be returned to their country of origin and that support and services revert to the National Asylum Support Service (often termed the NASS system) whilst they remain in the country².

Profile of unaccompanied children and young people

National picture

According to Home Office Immigration Statistics, the UK received 3,206 asylum claims from unaccompanied asylum seeking children in the year ending March 2016, a 57% increase on the year ending March 2015 with the highest numbers coming from Albania, Eritrea, Afghanistan, Syria, Vietnam, Iraq and Iran. 73% of all claims were granted refugee status, humanitarian protection or some other form of leave to remain in the UK. The majority of children were male (around 90%) and aged 16 or 17 (over 61%). Half of this age group was placed in semi-independent living arrangements and half were fostered, with nearly all under-16 year olds fostered.

Bristol picture

As of 20th January 2017 Bristol had 43 unaccompanied asylum seeking children in care and 21 care leavers. A detailed breakdown is provided as Appendix 1.

Children in Care

In the year ending March 2016, 22 children started to be looked after, a rise of 32% on the previous year's total of 15. The 2016 figure is in line with this year's referrals with 20 children becoming looked after up to 20th January 2017. The largest group are children from Afghanistan (26 = 60%), with smaller numbers from Eritrea, Albania, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria and Somalia. Similar to the national picture, the majority are male (40 = 93%) and aged 16 or 17 (24 = 56%). The majority of all unaccompanied children and young people live in foster care (30 = 70%), 11 (26%) live in supported independence and 2 (5%) in a children's home.

Care leavers

Bristol has 21 care leavers aged 18-21 who were unaccompanied asylum seeking children. The largest group are children from Afghanistan (11 = 52%), with a much smaller numbers from Albania and individual young people from Bangladesh, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Kenya and Mali. The majority are male (18 = 86%) and aged 18 or 19 (16 = 76%). The majority live in supported accommodation (7 = 33%), or continue to live with their former foster carer (4=19%) live in supported independence and 2 (5%) in a children's home. Meeting the needs of unaccompanied children and young people

² The DfE and the Home Office will issue regulations and guidance required to implement new support arrangements later in 2017. As part of this, DfE plan to consult on revised guidance for local authorities on the care of unaccompanied and trafficked children.

Health

Children and young people often require additional health care with young people having both physical and mental health needs relating to their experiences and journey to the UK. This is provided or brokered by our Children Looked After Nurses and Thinking Allowed Service.

Their experience suggests that for the first few weeks after arrival young people appear to cope well, sometimes showing signs of relief that their journey is over. However, leaving family, friends and country and travelling to the UK is often traumatic and on arrival the immigration process is complex, challenging and anti-therapeutic. After a number of months they often hear that some of these young men are having trouble sleeping, are irritable and short tempered, with formal assessment finding that they are showing signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Whilst there is no dedicated health service for unaccompanied children and young people in Bristol and the treatments offered are not always adapted or appropriate to their specific requirements, Thinking Allowed have established a pathway so that when a child or young person presents at The Haven (normally their first point of contact with services) the Children Looked After Nurses (CLAN) and Thinking Allowed are notified. The child's social workers and foster carer will then be invited to an appointment soon after the young person's arrival to begin to think about their emotional well-being and mental health and to identify things to look out for.

Additionally, the locality CAMHS' teams have developed considerable expertise, with the East Central Team in particular providing therapy to unaccompanied children and young people, support to foster carers and consultation to schools and other CAMHS teams. Their time is limited, and the absence of a dedicated health service means that some young people have to access adult specialist reception services or rely on school and foster carers.

A recent survey undertaken by Barnardo's in Bristol identified that staff and carers feel they lack the knowledge, experience or skills to feel confident in working with asylum seeking children and young people.

Education

The education of all unaccompanied children and young people (UASC) who come into in Bristol is overseen by The HOPE; Bristol's Virtual School for Children in Care.

What is The HOPE doing?

The HOPE supports Social Workers to apply for appropriate educational provision for all UASC.

- For UASC presenting with a date of birth which makes them of statutory school age (school years 7 to 11), this is an application to the closest school to the home address with a good or outstanding Ofsted judgement. The HOPE aims for all statutory school age UASC to be admitted within 20 school days of coming into care as per the Admissions Code. Bristol currently has 24 UASC of school age; of whom 23 are in school and 1 is newly arrived and awaiting a place.
- For older young people this is usually an application to the closest college offering a suitable ESOL course (English for Speakers of Other Languages). Bristol currently has 24 UASC in Years 12-14; of whom 22 are in college and 2 are newly arrived and awaiting a place.

Where The HOPE is made aware by the child's social worker or Asylum Team worker that it is thought the child may be older than the age they have given or may even be an adult, the HOPE work with social care colleagues and the education setting to ensure an appropriate course of action to safeguard all involved.

On two occasions, when an individual was thought to be an adult, no action was taken to identify education and both were subsequently referred on to NASS as adults and left care. On three occasions, young people have been placed on a school roll, but with applications to City of Bristol College for 'Early College' places while the age assessment was ongoing. City of Bristol College have worked to respond to need and provide a 15 hour per week provision. In these three cases, there was multi-agency agreement that this was the most appropriate course of action.

Successes

- The HOPE have significantly reduced the delay between UASC coming into care and their start in appropriate education, although the 20 day target as stipulated in the Admissions Code remains difficult to achieve.
- Practice has improved with social workers contacting The HOPE soon after a UASC arrives and apply for education in a timely manner.
- The HOPE facilitates closer partnership working between schools and children's social care.
- Schools are reassured that there is a fair distribution of UASC across schools and that age concerns are taken seriously and managed appropriately. The HOPE has also maintained a clear expectation that newly arrived young people should access mainstream education via the ordinary processes of application, just as would be the case for any other child.
- A flowchart of the process has been developed and is currently being trialled with East Central Social Work Teams, who case manage the majority of new arrivals.
- The HOPE have worked with EC schools to co-fund the post of 'Induction Officer for UASC' who started in post in September 2016. Her work is one of brokerage and assistance to ensure good communication between care, young person, school and other agencies. It also includes work with children from other local authorities in Bristol school – currently six young people, the same number as Bristol has in out of area schools.
- The HOPE and Schools Safeguarding Team are currently developing some training for school staff around understanding and meeting the needs UASC.
- Many UASC embrace the education they are offered in the UK, are highly ambitious and go on to make extraordinary progress. In the vast majority of cases, schools speak of UASC as extremely positive and hardworking, members of their schools.

Challenges

- Schools in some other LAs are much less willing to take UASC without a definitive date of birth and in others, schools places are oversubscribed, both having the effect of delaying entry to education.
- In some schools the provision of teaching English as a second language is extremely limited.
- Placement moves in the first few months can be multiple, particularly where emergency short-term accommodation has been sourced in the first instance. These geographical moves are the biggest challenge to meeting the '20 day' target with anticipation of potential moves sometimes causing Social Workers to delay making a school application.
- Age assessments and appeals can take in excess of six months, which breeds uncertainty for the young person, their school and placement.
- Funding for 'Early College' placements is below the cost of the course which creates a cost pressure that is currently met by the Council.
- City of Bristol College have accepted the majority of UASC post-16 students; this has put pressure on their English as a Second Language Course which in turn has meant delayed starts for UASC who arrive at the 'wrong' time of year i.e. February to July as they have to wait until September's intake.

Asylum team

Children's social workers work in close liaison with the asylum team to jointly undertake age assessments with the child's social worker and advise on immigration application and appeals process. Case law have directs that all age assessments must be completed by two qualified social workers³. Bristol's asylum team have developed considerable expertise in undertaking age assessments and are sometimes commissioned by other local authorities. The process must be evidence based and can require an extended period particularly when the assessment finds the young person to be older than their given age are often subject to legal challenge.

Safeguarding

In relation to age assessments, due regard must be given to safeguarding both unaccompanied and other children in foster care and at school ensuring that young adults or those who declared age may not reflect their true age are not

³ Referred to as 'Merton compliant'

placement and, as noted above, in school.

In 2014 the Government issued statutory guidance on unaccompanied and trafficked children outlining and enhancing local authority and other agencies' responsibilities under the Children Act to unaccompanied and trafficked children. It required local authorities to clearly record and plan measures that will safeguard and support children where trafficking is a concern.

Community support – the offer

The media coverage of the refugee camp in Calais captured the interest of many people in Bristol who then pledged their support for children and young people coming to live in the city. The Mayor too has been explicit in his commitment to Bristol as a City Of Sanctuary, offering an initial 10 placements to unaccompanied children.

As a result of this groundswell of support from various sections of the community, including refugee and faith communities, a project group chaired by the Placement Services Manager was formed to coordinate the offer to newly arrived children and young people. The offer includes practical help such as training to staff and carers as well as gifts such as 'start up home packs' for older young people, copies of the Quran, and donations of money to help with legal expenses as well as the offer of longer term sponsorship. At Christmas, friends of the Bristol Calais Refugee Solidarity group in Bristol and the USA raised over £1000 for the young people who had recently arrived from Calais that was gifted to young people and used in the January sales!

Placements

Bristol has developed its carer and supported accommodation provision to be better able to meet the needs of unaccompanied children and young people. Ensuring there is sufficient provision across a range of placement types remains a challenge. In November, in response to need and the community response, Bristol's fostering service led a recruitment event for people interested in fostering, providing supported lodgings or becoming a mentor. The response was huge with 150 people signing up to attend. A further event is scheduled for 31st January and 360 people have booked to attend.

At the event, the service registered the following enquiries:

- 1 short breaks for disabled children enquiry
- 1 adoption enquiry
- 40 mentoring enquiries- with many more emailed who couldn't make the meeting.
- 9 Supported Lodgings enquiries
- 16 Fostering Unaccompanied children only enquiries
- 6 Fostering Unaccompanied children or Supported Lodgings
- 2 Fostering Unaccompanied children or other types of fostering

From these enquiries 10 people are progressing with an application to become a mentor and 8 for fostering and/or supported lodgings. Reconstruct manage Bristol's Independent Visitor Scheme and will assess and train these mentors, expecting about one third to complete the course and be matched with a young person. 8 of the 10 are of white UK origin. In addition to this, Bristol is working with Home for Good, a Christian organisation focussed on triggering church communities to consider becoming foster carers or adopters.

In terms of supported accommodation, whilst all supported accommodation options are available to unaccompanied young people, Bristol has recently worked with 16-25 Independent People to secure two specific houses and additional support for two friendship groups of unaccompanied young people.

Bristol's Independent Reviewing Service

All children in care are allocated an Independent Reviewing Officer. The Reviewing Service has provided the following comment for Corporate Parenting Panel:

“There is often delay at the beginning of the child’s journey in care as age assessments can take a long time. This has varying consequences for the council. Some UASC in semi-independent living are at a disadvantage as support workers do not leave the accommodation, which in turn places a lot of pressure on the Social Worker to provide everything from a trip to the GP, to medicals, purchasing clothes, bedding and general company, whereas carers can meet a number of these needs in other placement types.

There has been huge improvement in progressing applications and working with the Home Office as it is now better understood by more workers. Bristol is so lucky to have the Asylum Team and Angela Evans whose knowledge is amazing. The team is now larger which we hope will speed up the completion of age assessments.”

Cost information

The Home Office makes an additional payment to a local authority caring for an unaccompanied minor in line with the following criteria:

Arrived in UK before 30/6/16:

- under 16 years - £95 per day
- over 16 - £71 per day

Arrived in UK after 1/7/16:

- under 16 £114 per day
- over 16 £91 per day

Payment is made in the expectation that it covers social work, independent review, advocacy, participation and independent visiting costs as well as the cost of the child’ or young person’s placement. In line with Children Act Requirements, the right placement is selected on the basis of an assessment of need. Some placement types cost far more than the funding available from government and, for the 43 children and young people for whom Bristol is currently submitting a claim, the in-year cost pressure to the local authority is just below £439k.

At December 31st, the following placement types were being used for the 43 children and young people:

- 13 with Bristol foster carers
- 14 with independent fostering agencies
- 7 in Bristol Children’s Homes
- 9 in supported accommodation including supported lodgings

Appendix 1

Bristol UASC statistics - 20 January 2017

NB Due to the small numbers involved, the percentages are not useful as a precise indicator of performance, and are presented here to give a 'rough idea' of the proportions. It is of particular importance to bear this in

mind when looking at the care leavers indicators.

The 'missing' figures have been presented for all children over the whole time period (rather than for a more specific group or period), as there were so few missing episodes/children with missing episodes.

Number of UASC currently being looked after

Bristol, 20 January 2017	43
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Number of UASC referral starts per year

Bristol, 01 April 2011 to 20 January 2017

year	number
2011/12	3
2012/13	8
2013/14	2
2014/15	15
2015/16	22
2016/17 (to 20/01/17)	20

Age profile of UASC currently being looked after

Bristol, 20 January 2017

Single year of age	number	%
12	1	2.3
13	2	4.6
14	6	14
15	10	23.3
16	10	23.3
17	14	32.6
Age group	number	%
12 to 15	19	44.2
16 and 17	24	55.8

Gender of UASC currently being looked after

Bristol, 20 January 2017

	number	%
Male	40	93
Female	3	7%

Country of origin of UASC currently being looked after

Bristol, 20 January 2017

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	number	%
Afghanistan	26	60
Eritrea	6	14
Albania	4	9
Egypt	2	5
Iran	2	5
Iraq	1	2
Nigeria	1	2
Somalia	1	2

Placement location of UASC currently being looked after

Bristol, 20 January 2017	Number	%
Bristol	31	72
Other West of England	8	19
Outside West of England	4	9

Placement type of UASC currently being looked after

Bristol, 20 January 2017	number	%
Agency FC	16	37
In-House FC	14	33
Supported Accommodation	10	23
In-house Children's Home	2	5
Independent Living	1	2

Missing episodes since 01 April 2011

	children	episodes	max episodes per child	notes
Absent without authority	2	3	2	
Missing	8	10	2	2 children went missing (1 in April 2011 and 1 in July 2014) and were not found - their cases were closed

UASC or former-UASC care leaver statistics

Bristol, 21 November 2016 to 20 January 2017		
	number	
Number eligible for, and receiving, care leaver support	21	
In touch within last 2 months	15	
In suitable accommodation	14	

In EET	13	
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Accommodation types of UASC or former-UASC care leavers, at their latest contact in the past 2 months		
Bristol, 21 November 2016 to 20 January 2017		
	number	
Semi-independent, transitional accommodation	7	
With Former foster carers	4	
With parents or relatives	1	
Independent living	1	
Emergency accommodation	1	
In custody	1	

Country of origin	
Afghanistan	11
Albania	4
Bangladesh	1
Eritrea	1
Iran	1
Iraq	1
Kenya	1
Mali	1
Gender	
Female	3
Male	18
Age (at 20/01/17)	
18	8
19	8
20	4
21	1