

# People Scrutiny Commission



**Report of:** Jacqui Jensen, Service Director Care and Support, Children and Families

**Title:** To apprise Scrutiny Commission of the current position in relation to caring for and supporting unaccompanied asylum seeking children in the City

**Ward:** City Wide

**Officer Presenting Report:** Anne Farmer, Area Manager East Central, Care and Support Children and Families, People

**Contact Telephone Number:** 0117 9 0367865

## Recommendation

It is recommended that the People Scrutiny Commission note the current services provision and the plans for developing services to meet the anticipated demand in the context of legislative and policy developments.

## Summary

**The report details the current service provision for this group, including the level of demand for services, and the legislative and policy changes that require changes to service delivery.**

**The significant issues in the report are:**

**The current cohort of UASC, their status, and statistical breakdown**  
**Placement sufficiency and development**  
**Workforce development**

# Care and Support, Children and Families

## Safeguarding Position Statement

### Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

---



#### 1. Overview of current arrangements

Currently all Local Authorities have a responsibility to accommodate Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children [UASC] as corporate parents under Section 20 of the 1989 Children Act. They should be treated as looked after children and provided with the health, education and care afforded to any child with the status of a Looked After Child.

- 1.1 In the year ending March 2016, 22 UASC 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 25 children becoming looked after up to 5<sup>th</sup> July 2017.
- 1.2 As of July 5, 2017 Bristol had 50 unaccompanied asylum seeking children in our care and 21 care leavers
- 1.3 There are three groups of unaccompanied children who arrive in the city:
  - i. Spontaneous arrivals are those who first present once they have arrived in Bristol
  - ii. Those accepted through the National Transfer Scheme which is administered by South West Councils, who 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 ratio<sup>1</sup> 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.
  - iii. Those accepted from Europe and the camps in Northern France or elsewhere (often referred to as 'Dubs' children).

#### 2 Current position

- 2.1. Currently all young people who are the responsibility of Bristol are cared for either within the Bristol area or placed as closely to Bristol as possible but remain the responsibility of Bristol under Looked After Children's requirements. The majority of all unaccompanied children and young people live in foster care: 37 ( 75%),;11 (21%) live in supported independent accommodation; and 2 (4 %) are living in a children's home.
- 2.2 Bristol has 21 care leavers aged 18-21 who were unaccompanied asylum seeking children when they came into care. The majority live in supported accommodation, however 7 (33%), continue to live with their former foster carer and (4=19%) live in supported independence and 2 (10%) in a children's home.
- 2.3 The largest group are children from Afghanistan (28= 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%).

---

<sup>1</sup> 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.

### **3 Age Assessments**

3.1 All young people receive an initial screening to determine their age, and if further assessment is required a more detailed age assessment is conducted to ensure that they are placed within both an educational and care service that meets their developmental needs and does not incur safeguarding risks or concerns within the educational and care placements. Children's social workers work closely with the Asylum Team to jointly undertake age assessments, which must be undertaken by 2 qualified social workers as determined by Case Law. Bristol has considerable expertise in this area.

### **3.2 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.

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.

3.3 For older young people this is usually an application to the closest college offering a suitable ESOL course (English for Speakers of Other Languages)

### **3.4 Health**

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 the support service for Looked After Children 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. Their experiences often impact after the initial settling in period and can manifest in some form of post traumatic syndrome and the CAHMS service provide additional expertise. Since January 2017 Area Social Work services have also had access to Primary Mental Health Specialists and their expertise is also being utilised to support the young people, social workers, and carers immediately after their arrival.

## **4 Areas of improvement in last year**

*Include innovative and creative responses, impact on outcomes for children*

4.1 Current developments include increasing the provision for the 16 plus age group by commissioning 2 small accommodation units from 16-25 Independent People, where 6 young people age assessed as over 16 years can live with key supports within a local community.

4.2 The recent campaign to recruit foster carers for asylum seeking children and young people indicated that there is willingness in Bristol to care for this vulnerable group. Following a recruitment event, which was well attended, 8 potential carers are progressing with fostering or specialist lodgings assessments, and 10 are wishing to be trained as mentors. However, further care placements are needed to meet demand.

4.3 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. The HOPE facilitates closer partnership working between schools and children's social care.

4.4 Training for foster carers, and social workers to support their development in working with this group by having a clearer understanding of the legislation, cultural issues and potential

trauma that young people have experienced has been developed. Training for social workers has been arranged during 2017 and 80 social workers will have received training by the end of the year.

## **5 Identified areas for improvement or development**

### *Responding to key risks*

- 5.1 Placement sufficiency continues to be a key challenge. The range of suitably knowledgeable and confident foster carers to meet the needs of these children and young people does not currently meet demand.
- 5.2 Based on the current cohort, there is a need for more independent accommodation similar that provided by 16:25 Independent People.
- 5.3 The voluntary sector in the city has provided valuable support and opportunities for integration and care to ensure that young people have an opportunity to develop links with the refugee and established communities that reflect their country of origin. However, a more coherent and 'joined up' offer is needed. There has been a start to this work during the November to January 2017 period. A series of meetings was arranged with faith based and voluntary organisations that are keen to work the Bristol both on meeting specific need, and by developing an offer to young people to support their integration.
- 5.4 For some young people, there is a need to provide a more coherent educational offer, particularly when young people arrive mid-point in the academic year with limited understanding of English and a disrupted educational experience.

## **6 Priority Actions**

### *Responding to section 4 above. Link to relevant improvement plan etc.*

- 6.1 Placement sufficiency - to ensure that there are sufficient care placements to meet the need of those requiring foster care, lodgings and more independent living opportunities. This will be led by the specialist children's commissioning service and the Fostering service as part of recruitment plans during 2017.
- 6.2 Increased training and development for carers and social workers, to help them: understand the emotional trauma experienced by many UASC; to understand the underpinning legislation; and to develop cultural competence to meet the needs of this group. This will be taken forward by the Children's Workforce Service.
- 6.3 Developing an integrated offer by working closely with the faith based organisations and the voluntary sector, led jointly by the Area Manager for Bristol East Central and the Through Care Head of Service.
- 6.4 Joint work with the HOPE school to improve access to education in both schools and appropriate FE colleges.

## **7 Supporting information and evidence**

*The report presented to the corporate parenting panel 6th February 2017, provides more detail. .*

**Author:** Anne Farmer, Area Service Manager – East/Central

**Date:** 7<sup>th</sup> July 2017