

People Scrutiny

21st November 2016



Report of: Anne James, Equality and Community Cohesion Team Leader

Title: Bristol as City of Sanctuary and Supporting refugees and asylum seekers, including unaccompanied minors / care leavers

Ward: Citywide

Officer Presenting Report: Mike Hennessey - Service Director (Care and Support - Adults) and Hilary Brooks – Service Director (Care and Support – Children and Families)

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Recommendation

That the Committee note the report and its contents and comment the proposed approach to developing a City of Sanctuary Strategy

Summary

The report updates on the work being undertaken in Bristol on supporting refugees and asylum seekers, including unaccompanied minors/care leavers, and City of Sanctuary.

The significant issues in the report are:

1. To update Scrutiny on the numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Bristol and the plans to accommodate children from Europe
2. To update Scrutiny on the numbers of Syrian Refugees accommodated within the city and the plans to commission housing and support from the third sector
3. To update Scrutiny on partnership arrangements and proposed governance for refugee and asylum seeker work going forward
4. To consult Scrutiny on the proposed approach to developing a City of Sanctuary Strategy
5. To update scrutiny on the financial challenges for this work



Policy

Not applicable

Consultation

Internal

Not applicable

External

Not applicable

Context

1 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

- 1.1 The term 'unaccompanied minors' or unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) describes all foreign nationals or stateless persons below the age of 18, who either arrive in the EU unaccompanied by a responsible adult or who are left unaccompanied after their arrival. Legally UASC are treated as looked after children with the additional right to legal aid to support their asylum claim.
- 1.2 The Asylum Team, managed by Children and Families East and Central Service Manager, is currently working with 53 UASC, most of whom have claimed asylum in Bristol. This is a significant increase in the past year (in September 2015 the team were supporting 17 UASC).
- 1.3 The Government has made a commitment to accommodating UASC from Europe (Refugee children who sought sanctuary in Europe before March 2016). There are 88,000 UASC in Europe, 51% are Afghani and 91% are boys. Most are aged 16-17. This commitment is part of the Immigration Act 2016 and is known as the 'Dubs amendment' (after Lord Alfred Dubs who campaigned for the amendment). At present BCC is accommodating 4 children from the closure of the illegal camp in Calais known as the Jungle (Dubs children), and has plans to accommodate ten children by December 2016.
- 1.4 Some UASC in Europe have family in the UK. The Home Office has accelerated processing family reunion claims for children from Calais/the Jungle. These rights are under the Dublin3 agreement. BCC is supporting 3 children with family links in Bristol.
- 1.5 A recruitment campaign, using social media and partnership contacts, is underway to build on the local support for unaccompanied refugee children in Europe and recruit foster carers specifically to care for these children, 43 people have registered an interest in becoming a foster carer through the council's website, 160 have registered to attend an evening event on 22nd November and Homes for Good, a national organisation who promote fostering UASC, will share with BCC the names and contacts for 150 people from Bristol who have registered an interest through seeing their national publicity. The interest is being managed to ensure children's services have the capacity to follow up every contact, undertake Home Visits and undertake the 12 week foster carer assessment process to ensure as many contacts as possible are converted into foster carers, supported lodgings providers and independent visitors.
- 1.6 In the short term, a reception centre has been opened providing residential accommodation for the young people from Calais, the costs of running the reception

centre will exceed home office funding by between £100k and £300k according to how long it remains open. Longer term we are confident that the recruitment campaign will increase the numbers of foster carers and supported lodgings in the city and funding from the home office is likely to cover foster and supported lodgings placements costs but will not cover the social worker resources needed to comply with looked after children staffing requirements.

- 1.7 There is significant support being offered from civic society, volunteer led organisations and faith groups to support the council to provide support for unaccompanied asylum seeking children in the city. A working group will be established to ensure these offers of civic support are matched to the children's individual needs.

2 Syrian Vulnerable Person's Scheme

- 2.1 Home Office's Syrian Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme is managed in-house by the Equality and Community Cohesion Team. By December 2016, ten Syrian refugee families (47 people) will be resettled in Bristol under this programme. The scheme has been a success and a steady flow of landlords are contacting the project to offer private sector housing at affordable rates for the Syrian families, homeless families are unaffected by this scheme. The council has made a commitment to resettle 25 families each year, 100 people each year for the duration of the programme (until 2020).
- 2.2 As numbers grow, we will need to increase the capacity to provide support and currently we are developing a proposal around this. There is pressure on school places in Bristol and at present schools have been able to meet demand from UASC and the Syrian VPR scheme, but the Syrian children aged 3 and under are on waiting lists for nursery places. The Haven, the community health provider for refugees in the city, is working with the Syrian families and UASC from Bristol and South Gloucester which has created additional pressure on their service the pressure to date has been manageable.

3 Wider Refugee and Asylum Seeking issues in the City

- 3.1 Bristol has a well-established, self-organised network of voluntary and community sector provision which includes:
 - Fourteen different organisations offering support to refugees and asylum seekers
 - Welcome Centres, operating five days a week supporting approximately 550 refugees and asylum seekers each week. The welcome centres are for adults and offer hot food, legal advice for immigration matters, English for Speakers of Other Languages courses (ESOL) with crèche, advice on housing, benefits etc, volunteering opportunities, training courses assisting with integration including managing money and healthy relationships courses, access to befrienders and mentors and even a barbers.
 - Homes with the equivalent of 100 bed spaces for refugees who have recently received status
 - 30 long term supported lodging for destitute asylum seekers
 - 30 short term supported lodgings for young people aged 18-25 which can be accessed by destitute asylum seekers
- 3.2 The sector receives £75k per annum in core funding, and is currently reapplying for

funding through Bristol Impact Fund (the new Grants Prospectus). The sector has reviewed how it can work together more effectively and is keen for the council to be a key partner in resource coordination and planning. A key need is to find accommodation from which the organisations can deliver drop ins for five days a week and also provide centralised information advice and contacts. The sector has requested support from the council to identify appropriate properties available for Community Asset Transfer which could be used for this purpose.

- 3.3 The Mayor had pledged to develop a City of Sanctuary Strategy: The draft strategy is appended as Appendix 1. Bristol Refugee Forum has been approached to lead this development.

4 Destitution

- 4.1 The council has a responsibility to provide accommodation (and therefore welfare support) to destitute refused asylum seekers where they have a need for care and attention because of their age, an illness or a disability affects their ability to live independently, provided this need has not arisen solely due to destitution or the anticipated effects of destitution. BCC currently support 11 destitute adults who have been assessed as having community care needs who have no recourse to public funds.
- 4.2 The council also has a duty to support destitute families who have been refused status in order to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child or children in that family. If a child is 'in need' the local authority can provide services which 'may include providing accommodation and giving assistance in kind or in cash'. BCC currently supports between 50-60 families, mainly in emergency bed and breakfast accommodation. In 2016-17, BCC is projected to pay £260k in subsistence payments (58K over budget) and £913k in accommodation costs (£243k over budget).
- 4.3 The Immigration Act 2016 introduces new measures to make it easier to enforce immigration laws and remove illegal migrants and to remove support for failed asylum seekers whose asylum claim is finally rejected on or after 1 July 2016. Those who have a dependent child would cease to receive support after a grace period of 28 days following the end of an asylum claim. It is anticipated this will create greater hardship and possibly greater reliance on council funding. Also the new act will change arrangements for looked after children, who have no immigration permission when they turn 18, who will be excluded from receiving all forms of care leaving support (accommodation, financial support, contact, a personal adviser, a pathway plan, funding for education or training and 'staying put' with foster carers).
- 4.4 The council is aware of the risks of increased destitution in the city. Following the implementation of these elements of the Immigration Act in February 2017, the Asylum Team will continue to undertake assessments under the Children's Act, to see where is the need? The team will explore whether families can be supported to return to their home country or not. Destitute families may be granted temporary leave to remain but they do not have access to benefits and rely on the Asylum Team to provide for their essential needs. The Asylum Team will work with the UK Border Agency to push claims forward but it is likely that the changes will create an additional overspend from the Asylum Team.

5 Resources needed

- 5.1 There is a need for a single point of contact in the council to progress refugee and asylum issues. Significant progress has been made in the past year but additional resources are needed to develop the work. A programme manager post needs to be created to oversee the next steps.

- There is funding for a one year programme manager using the management costs built into the Syrian VPR Home Office funding, which could oversee the resettlement of 25 new Syrian families and 5 vulnerable children's families and commission the Syrian VPR scheme from a third party provider
- There is a need to work with the Bristol Refugee Forum to develop it into a governance structure to oversee the development of a Bristol City of Sanctuary strategy and governance of the Home Office Programmes and there is a need to progress actions from the strategy.
- There are opportunities to utilise the third party offers of help to achieve savings.
- The City of Sanctuary Strategy also needs an ambitious and innovative approach to relieving destitution to prevent future overspends.

5.2 The new work to accommodate ten new UASC from Europe has created additional costs: to develop placements for unaccompanied asylum seeking children; the costs of setting up and staffing a residential reception centre; the additional staff needed to fast track the recruitment process for UASC foster carers; new contracts with supported lodgings providers and independent visitor contracts.

6 Conclusion

- 6.1 There are some real strengths within the refugee and asylum seeker sector: the network of welcome centres relieve destitution for 550 refugees and asylum seekers each week, Children's Services responded very quickly to the call for support with UASC who were displaced by the closure of the Calais camp (The Jungle). There is a real appetite for refugee and asylum seeker organisations to work more closely with each other and the council to improve pathways and outcomes for refugees and asylum seekers.
- 6.2 There has been a significant increase both in strategic demand and operational demand to provide better support for the City of Sanctuary, asylum seekers and refugees and UASC and consideration is being given as to how to resource and meet this increase in demand.

Which directorates / executive portfolios are affected by the proposal / issue ?

Neighbourhoods – VCS Impact fund & Private Housing

Schools

People - Children and Families Safeguarding and Care and Support

Business Change – Equality and Community Cohesion Team

Cabinet Member for Homes – Paul Smith

Cabinet Member for People – Clare Campion-Smith

Cabinet Member for Equality and Neighbourhoods – Asher Craig

Will this require a key decision to be taken by the Mayor at a Cabinet meeting?

When is it planned that the key decision should be taken ?

The Cabinet will be required to agree any commissioning process for the Syrian VPR scheme because the value of the contract will exceed £500k

Comments from relevant Service Directors: N/A

Comments from relevant Strategic Directors: N/A

Financial implications / issues:

Has the Finance Business Partner been consulted yes

Insert details, plus any advice received.

Legal issues: N/A

Comments / steer from relevant DLT: N/A

Comments / steer from SLT: N/A

Comments from Mayor’s or Assistant Mayor’s briefing: N/A

Comments from Cabinet / SLT Executive Board: N/A