

Corporate Parenting Panel

13 September 2024

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children Update



Report of Rachel Farnham, Head of Children's Social Care, Children and Young People's Services, DCC

Electoral division(s) affected:

None

Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of the report is to update members of the Corporate Parenting Panel on the progress of the Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) Team.

Executive summary

- 2 The UASC Team was formed on a temporary basis in February 2022. The team is currently in the process of becoming permanent, with recruitment underway.
- 3 The UASC Team sits within the Care Leaver Service and uses resources and knowledge within the wider service including the Peer Mentoring Project, Staying Close and the Emotional Wellbeing Worker.
- 4 The focus of the UASC Team is to provide consistent specialist support, care and guidance for those young people who have come to Durham under the National Transfer Scheme or through spontaneous arrival.
- 5 There are currently 84 UASC in our care and 54 UASC Care Leavers engaged with the service.
- 6 The UASC Team have continued to work well within a multi-agency group with bi-monthly meetings taking place. Colleagues involved include, health, education, fostering and placements, amongst others.
- 7 A range of social activities including football, cricket and cooking continue to be offered as well as activities arranged with other care leavers such as the recent drumming session.
- 8 There is a focus on development of staff within the team and increasing knowledge externally to understand and support the needs of UASC.

The team manager also delivers sessions to a range of professionals to increase wider knowledge of this cohort.

Recommendation

- 9 Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to:
 - (a) receive and note the update report.

Background

- 10 The Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) Team was established in February 2022 in response to the increased demand for social work capacity and caring provisions for UASC referred to Durham by the Home Office National Transfer Scheme (NTS). Until this point UASC had been allocated social workers through the Children Looked After Service.
- 11 The Team Manager was appointed in February 2022 and the team was set up as part of the Care Leaver Service.

Understanding the Young People

- 12 There are currently 84 UASC in our care and 54 UASC Care Leavers engaged with the service.
- 13 Since July 2023 the Team has taken 58 young people from the Home Office NTS. Some of these are now Care Leavers as there is a constant through flow of young people who transition into adulthood.
- 14 Our threshold capacity, in line with the Home Office NTS, stands at 98 young people under the age of 18 years. When a young person becomes a care leaver on reaching the age of 18, they are deducted from the overall number.
- 15 Currently there is no pattern to how often we receive Home Office referrals. The County Durham UASC Team have, on occasion, requested additional referrals when there has been social worker and housing capacity for young people, so that we can ensure there are more planned moves. Since December 2023 we have taken 11 referrals in addition to those routinely allocated by the Home Office. This allows for more of a planned approach when allocating social workers and housing to young people.
- 16 In addition, there have been four spontaneous arrivals since October 2023. One of those is now closed following an age assessment.
- 17 The Team has completed three age assessments since July 2023 when there has been evidence which has led the service to believe that the reported age of the young person may be incorrect.
- 18 The Team are supporting young people from 15 different countries; the majority of young people arrive from Afghanistan, Sudan, Iran or Iraq.
- 19 There are 17 children looked after with Leave to Remain.
- 20 There are 37 Care Leavers, aged between 18 and 25 years, with Leave to Remain.

- 21 From July 2023 any young person arriving in the country via what was deemed as an illegal route was deemed unable to claim asylum.
- 22 Overall, young people settle well into the community and their new homes, they attend education and enjoy social inclusion opportunities.
- 23 The Team are supporting three young people who have had frequent missing periods. The main concern being that they could become victims of exploitation.
- 24 There are 25 young people in foster homes outside of County Durham. The distances of those placed out of area range from South Shields to Oxford.
- 25 Recently, we have been able to place two young people with a DCC foster home.
- 26 There is one young person who has graduated from university and is now in employment with the NHS. Another young person is currently enrolled at university with another planning to attend this year.
- 27 Links have been made with the Morrison Busty Depot, a DCC facility which has a plant nursery. They are supporting sessional employment for young people with Leave to Remain and we currently have two young people going through the HR recruitment process.

Structure of the Team

- 28 The temporary team currently consists of a Team Manager, seven Social Workers, (three of these are part-time, one Social Worker is based in London) and four Young People's Advisors.
- 29 The permanent team will consist of a Team Manager, a Consultant Social Worker, five Social Workers and three Young Peoples Advisors.

Developments

- 30 Having a focussed team allows training and development to take place, some areas this has been achieved in are:
 - (a) Age Assessment Training
 - (b) Trauma Informed Training related to UASC
 - (c) The Illegal Migration Act
 - (d) No Access to Public Recourse
 - (e) Human Rights Act Assessment

- (f) Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children/Care Leavers – Care Planning training
 - (g) The Team Manager has delivered numerous training sessions to areas such as Families First, EDT, Early Help, and the Social Work Academy.
 - (h) The Team Manager has delivered information sessions to external agencies such as Durham University and regional practitioner groups. The Team Manager attends a monthly regional group where we learn from the experience of other authorities, including Redcar and Cleveland who also have an Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children focussed team.
- 31 The Service Manager attends the refugee and resettlement meeting to support in partnership working to provide support and services for our young people.
- 32 The UASC multi agency group meets bi-monthly. This allows multi agency information to be shared and consideration to be given to how we work together, including health, education, and the voluntary sector to meet this group of young people's needs and support both physical and mental health recovery.
- 33 The Care Leavers Hub is used by UASC including for support from the Refugee Council.
- 34 We now have welcome packs established and are thankful of the support from Elected Members as part of their corporate parenting role to make this possible. This has been further developed with Prayer Mats, Sleep Hygiene Packs as the team have linked in with charities and gained further funding.
- 35 The UASC Team has New Arrival Packs which include clothing, toiletries, and stationery also from the work completed with charities.
- 36 There has been a toolbox of information developed for young people in other languages. These are resources that can be shared by social workers with young people quickly or when needed. The Emergency Duty Team now have some of these resources to allow young people who may have arrived out of hours to have some initial information provided to them in their language.
- 37 Our cohort of UASC and young people are now represented on the Children in Care Council. A young person is involved in numerous groups such as the New Venture Fund and Experts from Experience Group, and is to become a Peer Mentor. We are exploring a paid position with a local charity.

- 38 Community and celebration events continue including for Eid, Cricket days, weekly football sessions. Sessions have taken place with other Care Leavers such as a recent Peer Mentoring Event.



Challenges

- 39 It is difficult to find a foster home for young people under 16 in the North East of England. The team manager is working with Durham County Council's fostering recruitment team to encourage and target possible foster carers. There is now an in-house foster carer caring for two young people and this experience will be used positively to recruit other foster carers.
- 40 There has been a delay in the Home Office processing Asylum claims which means that we continue to fund young people's accommodation and daily living costs beyond them being 18 years old. This has been compounded by young people not being able to claim Leave to Remain from July 2023.
- 41 Ensuring Initial Health Assessments happen within timeframes is difficult, but we are working with Dr Christine Powell on a system to improve this.
- 42 Registering with a dentist is a challenge for young people, however, this is now improving with only one young person noted as not having a dental appointment within the last year.

- 43 The Emotional Wellbeing Worker within the Care Leavers Service is meeting with groups of young people and including them in the support groups taking place.
- 44 How the Illegal Migration Act would be put into practise has not yet been fully outlined. This is now further complicating as the act was created by a former government.
- 45 There is now a new government and its unclear what changes will be made to legislation.

Main implications

- 46 Young people who are UASC are well supported within County Durham.
- 47 The experience of the bespoke UASC Team is being used to develop services both internally and externally and increase understanding of this group of young people.

Conclusion

- 48 The team has continued to function well over the last year focussing on the very individual needs of young people who have suffered trauma travelling to this country, come from a range of cultures and with different languages. Their knowledge of these young people is increasing and the resources to support young people continue to be developed.
- 49 Future developments will take place once the permanent team is established, and any new legislation is understood. Developmental areas include:
 - (a) Building capacity in local foster homes to prevent under 16's being placed outside of the local area.
 - (b) Continuing to work with the Home Office and supported accommodation providers to ensure that young people are moved in a more planned way.
 - (c) Understand the challenges of young people being placed out of the area becoming Care Leavers and have little access to housing support and how we can build better links with housing providers in the areas that they live.
 - (d) Use the new Care Leavers Hub at Stanley Leisure Centre to increase the use of emotional wellbeing support and have a more inclusive approach to activities with other children looked after and care leavers.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Young people who come into the care of DCC under the NTS are cared for under the Care Act 2004 and Children Act 2004.

Finance

DCC are awarded funding for the young people's accommodation needs.

Consultation and Engagement

Not applicable.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Not applicable.

Climate Change

Not applicable.

Human Rights

Not applicable.

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable.

Staffing

Details of the Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) Team are included in the body of the report.

Accommodation

DCC's CSC provide accommodation for the young people.

Risk

Not applicable.

Procurement

Not applicable.