

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

11 JANUARY 2018

**MEMBER'S ITEM: YOUNG REFUGEES AND
UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM SEEKING CHILDREN**

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Services

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Summary

This report sets out the response to a number of questions, raised by Councillor Johnson regarding young refugees and unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

1.1 Under Medway Constitution Overview and Scrutiny rules (Chapter 4, Part 5, Paragraph 9.1) Councillor Johnson has requested that an item on this matter is included on the agenda for this meeting.

2. The Issue

2.1 Councillor Johnson requested that an item was placed on the agenda regarding young refugees and unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

2.2 Specifically Councillor Johnson articulated that there are numbers of young refugees and unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Medway, who are part of our community. Some of these children are the responsibility of Kent County Council and some are the responsibility of Medway Council. Councillor Johnson expressed that members should have a sound understanding of these vulnerable young people and the support which they are receiving.

2.3 Councillor Johnson has requested the following information:

- How many young refugees and unaccompanied asylum seeking children are there in Medway who are Medway's responsibility?
- How many young refugees and unaccompanied asylum seeking children are there in Medway who are Kent's responsibility?

- How many of the above categories are 16 or under?
- How many are over 16?
- What are the arrangements between Kent County Council and Medway Council for liaison over those young people who are Kent County Council's responsibility but who live in Medway?
- What are the arrangements made for education for these young people?
- What arrangements are made for health care for these young people?
- What are the means of financial support for these young people?
- What are arrangements for housing?
- What counselling is available?
- What access do these young people have to library, leisure and sporting facilities?
- What opportunities exist for these young people to access TEFL lessons in Medway?
- What access to corporate parenting events for looked after children are there, such as the summer barbecue?
- What funding arrangements are in place to fund services for these young people?
- What is the current expenditure on services for these young people?
- What arrangements are in place to support these young people as they reach 18 and their legal status potentially changes?

3 Director's comments

- 3.1 How many young refugees and unaccompanied asylum seeking children are there in Medway who are Medway's responsibility?
- 3.1.1 There are currently no child refugees and less than 5 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) who are Medway's responsibility. The reason that the precise number of children has not been provided is in order to ensure the privacy of the individuals concerned.
- 3.2 How many young refugees and unaccompanied asylum seeking children are there in Medway who are Kent's responsibility?
- 3.2.1 It has been advised by other Local Authorities that 41 UASC have been placed within Medway, 35 of the UASC are from Kent. Local Authorities are not required to advise Medway Council if any refugee families are placed within the Medway boundary, so this information is not held.
- 3.3 How many of the above categories are 16 or under?
- 3.3.1 There are 18 UASC aged 16 or under placed in Medway by other Local Authorities, of which 14 are placed by Kent. There are less than 5 UASC who are Medway's responsibility.

- 3.4 How many are over 16?
- 3.4.1 There are 23 UASC aged 17 placed in Medway by other Local Authorities, of which 21 are placed by Kent. There are less than 5 UASC who are Medway's responsibility.
- 3.5 What are the arrangements between Kent County Council and Medway Council for liaison over those young people who are Kent County Council's responsibility but who live in Medway?
- 3.5.1 Those young people who have been placed within Medway by Kent County Council are in care as "looked after" children (LAC). As such, Kent County Council has statutory responsibility for their welfare and has to act as a corporate parent to them. Although they have been placed with independent foster agencies in the Medway area, Kent retains case responsibility for the young people, which includes paying for their placements and support costs from the UASC grant that they receive. Each young person will also have an allocated social worker in Kent.
- 3.5.2 Medway Council do not have regular meetings with Kent County Council regarding these children and young people as Medway Council does not have case responsibility for them.
- 3.5.3 Young people do access our universal services such as health and education. This also applies to Medway Looked After Children that we place in other areas.
- 3.6 What are the arrangements made for education for these young people?
- 3.6.1 The arrangements for children placed by other authorities are made by those authorities. As residents of Medway, these young people have access to local education provision. They may also attend educational provision outside Medway while living within the Medway boundary.
- 3.6.2 For the UASC who are the responsibility of Medway, they are supported to access education through their allocated social worker or Personal Advisors if they are over 18. All Medway UASC are either in education, employment or training.
- 3.7 What arrangements are made for health care for these young people?
- 3.7.1 As with access to education, for those young people placed by other authorities they retain responsibility for ensuring access to universal and specialist health services according to need. For the UASC that Medway are responsible for, they are registered with local GPs, dentists and opticians and when needed, are referred to appropriate additional health services. Where those young people are under 18, Looked After Health Assessments are undertaken annually subject to the consent of the young person.

- 3.8 What are the means of financial support for these young people?
- 3.8.1 Local Authorities are responsible for providing financial support to those under 18. Where there is no access to public funds, the Local Authority provides financial support in line with other care leavers and in response to additional specific need. This is the case for those young people who are Medway's responsibility.
- 3.9 What are arrangements for housing?
- 3.9.1 In relation to the Medway young people, they are in placements provided by foster carers or Supported Accommodation where they are care leavers. These young people are supported to access independent housing when they have sufficient independent living skills. Other placing Local Authorities will discharge their responsibilities similarly.
- 3.10 What counselling is available?
- 3.10.1 Medway young people will have access to our Medway Mental Health & Wellbeing Service. Medway Council have a reciprocal arrangement with Kent that our Child and Adolescent Support Team (CAMHS) will support any Medway child placed in Kent and vice versa. Medway Council's CAMHS will provide support to any LAC placed by other Local Authorities in Medway but under a national agreement would recharge the responsible CCG for the cost.
- 3.10.2 As adults these young people may access counselling or other mental health services via their GPs.
- 3.11 What access do these young people have to library, leisure and sporting facilities?
- 3.11.1 There is no restriction on access to library, leisure and sporting facilities for UASC resident in Medway. The usual membership processes would need to be followed and funded by placing authorities. Medway young people have access to the leisure pass.
- 3.12 What opportunities exist for these young people to access TEFL lessons in Medway?
- 3.12.1 As part of their educational needs Medway Children's Services would support access to TEFL through their college placements or within school for those of school age.
- 3.12.2 Other placing authorities are responsible for making such arrangements for their UASC.

3.13 What access to corporate parenting events for looked after children are there, such as the summer barbecue?

3.13.1 UASC young people who are in the care of Medway Council or have left the care of Medway Council have full access to the same corporate parenting events as all Medway's Looked After Children.

3.14 What funding arrangements are in place to fund services for these young people?

3.14.1 The placement and support needs for UASCs are met by the placing authorities and provision is equal to non UASC Looked After Children.

3.15 What is the current expenditure on services for these young people?

3.15.1 The current placement costs for Medway UASC are on average £655 per week. However, the home office provide a grant of £71 per day for eligible 16-17 year olds, reducing the current average weekly cost to £283 per week.

3.15.2 For care leavers, there is the weekly personal allowance of £57.90 and where there are specific needs, occasionally one off payments are made, for example to fund their applications for Leave to Remain when they approach the age of 18.

3.16 What arrangements are in place to support these young people as they reach 18 and their legal status potentially changes?

3.16.1 All young people in the care of Medway Council are allocated a Personal Advisor from the Leaving Care team once they reach the age of 16 to work alongside the allocated social worker in order to support preparation for independence. At 18 the Personal Advisor becomes the lead in supporting the young person. Such support is set out within the young person's Pathway Plan which is the document that follows a care plan with a greater focus on independence and adult areas of life.

3.16.2 As the Corporate Parent to these young people, Medway provides funds for the application to the Home Office for Leave to Remain to give access to secure immigration status for these young people post 18. Support continues until the outcome of that application and subsequent appeals.

3.16.3 The aforementioned process is standard practice, therefore, is it likely to be followed by those authorities responsible for young people placed in Medway; however, precise information is not held as there is no requirement for such information to be shared with Medway.

4. Risk Management

4.1

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk Rating
The number of UASC in Medway increases	There is a sudden increase in the number of UASC placed in Medway by other authorities.	The national dispersal schemes have meant that the number of UASC placed in Medway by other local authorities has reduced significantly in the last year. This is unlikely to be reversed	C2
The UASC placed in Medway become at risk of exploitation	The UASC placed in the Medway area are among the most vulnerable of young people who have been in care and therefore more likely to be exploited, become at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation or gang involvement.	This risk is well known and there are robust processes across both Kent and Medway to monitor young people missing or at risk of child sexual exploitation. Work is going on with Kent Police across the area to improve responses to vulnerable people with risk panels in place to monitor activity and to identify vulnerable individuals.	C2

5. Financial and Legal Implications

- 5.1 In July 2016 the House of Lords European Union Select Committee produced a report on Children in Crisis: unaccompanied migrant children in the EU. This report found that the needs of UASC are systematically not being met not only in the UK but across the EU. The report found that such children encounter a culture of disbelief and suspicion on the part of the authorities and that they are at increased risk of exploitation by traffickers and others. Unaccompanied asylum seeking children face challenges at the assessment stage, through to the provision of satisfactory levels of services once they have passed through the initial hurdles.
- 5.2 Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking Children fall under the provisions of S17 of the Children Act 1989. Without local authority support UASC are unlikely to achieve or maintain or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining a reasonable standard of health or development. Local authorities have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of such children. Part of these duties include the provision of accommodation.

- 5.3 Section 69 of the Immigration Act 2016 allows for the transfer of unaccompanied asylum seeking children from one local authority to another. A National Transfer Scheme has been in operation since 1st July 2016, this voluntary scheme is meant to ensure a more even distribution of caring responsibility across the country.
- 5.4 Medway Council is under a duty to comply with legislation under the Equality Act 2010 to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation. This duty needs to be taken into account when assessing and providing for UASC.
- 5.5 The total weekly cost of current UASC placements is £2,621 per week. However, the home office provide a grant of £71 per day for eligible 16-17 year olds, reducing the total weekly cost to £1,130 per week.

6. Recommendation

- 6.1 The Committee is asked to note this report.

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Appendices

None

Background Papers

None