

TITLE OF REPORT: Update on asylum and refugee migration in Gateshead

REPORT TO: Health & Wellbeing Board

Purpose of the Report:

To provide the Board with an interim report covering an overview and update on asylum and refugee migration and the implications for Gateshead.

Background

A report was recently shared at the Gateshead System Cares Board where it was agreed to provide an overview report to the Health and Wellbeing Board on the current pressures in relation to asylum and refugee migration.

What we currently do:

Since 2015 the Council have previously made a commitment to support individuals who have come via formal refugee resettlement routes this includes the Syrian, Afghan and Ukraine resettlement programmes. All these programmes have been pre-arranged responses by the Home Office and have required engagement and planning with councils. Gateshead councils Refugee Resettlement Team are funded by the Home Office to provide resettlement support and as part of the response have working proactively with key partners to ensure we provide a holistic and robust response to new arrivals; this includes partnership working with:

- Health
- Education
- ESOL – language support
- DWP and Employment Services
- Community and Voluntary Sector
- Northumbria Police

This is a very specific and targeted response to those who are classed as entering the UK via safe and legal routes organised by the Home Office to provide formal relocation and international protection.

The asylum process is managed by the Home Office, and they contract companies to provide accommodation and some support to those who are claiming asylum, in the North-East this is Mears.

When a person's asylum claim is processed by the Home Office, and they receive leave to remain (refugee status) they can then access statutory services. Councils do not receive any formal funding for this group of people and as such there is no targeted support.

Emerging Pressures:

Asylum Seekers

In December 2022 the Prime Minister set a target to clear the legacy backlog of asylum seekers (175,000 people) by the end of 2023. This legacy backlog refers to asylum applications lodged before June 2022. Applications post June 2022 will be subject to the legislative changes under the Illegal Migration Bill.

If a person is granted asylum they have leave to remain and at this point can access statutory services including homeless services and have the right to claim benefits or work. Nationally councils are seeing an increase in the numbers of people who have been granted leave to remain presenting for support.

The accommodation provider will usually receive notification from the Home Office and then issue a 28-day Notice to Quit. At this point asylum seekers are no longer eligible for asylum support and become eligible for mainstream services. This process is now much shorter than the 28-day period as the Home Office is starting this process from when the leave to remain decision is issued and not from when the client is notified; the impact of this is that councils are seeing people present to homeless services with shorter timeframes to eviction and in more urgent need of support. The average eviction time in Gateshead has reduced from twenty-eight to seven working days.

The last publicly released asylum data in August 2023 identified Gateshead asylum numbers at 815 people, since August 2023 Gateshead have seen an increase in those granted leave to remain and presenting for support.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

The National Transfer Scheme (NTS) is a system designed to distribute the responsibility of caring for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children amongst local authorities nationally. It was created to prevent any single local authority becoming disproportionately responsible for a high number of individuals arriving into their care.

The specific calculation of the numbers of children allocated to a local authority within the national transfer scheme involves factors such as population size, capacity, resources, and the number of children already in the care of the local authority.

Refugee Resettlement

Gateshead Council have supported refugee resettlement since 2015 when the Syrian resettlement scheme was launched by the Home Office. Currently two resettlement schemes are open these are Homes for Ukraine and the Afghan Assistance Scheme. Gateshead Council are supportive of both schemes. The Home Office are now seeking a commitment from local authorities to future resettlement from 2025.

Work undertaken to date:

- Regionally councils are working with the Home Office to identify the numbers of people who will no longer be eligible for asylum support and may present to the Council.
- Information on asylum cessations will be shared with the relevant service areas.
- To have a continued overview of potential pressures, data is also being gathered on the number and demographic of those presenting to the Council.
- We continue to work closely with the Voluntary and Community Sector to offer advice and support and coordinate monthly meetings with over 30 VCS groups in attendance.
- Childrens Social Care are aware of the implications of the National Transfer Scheme and continue to work with the Home Office on this programme.
- Established partnership work will continue with key services such as education, employment, and health services.

Implications for the Local Authority

Due to Immigration policy changes (Illegal Migration Bill) implemented by the Home Office there are several implications for the council to consider.

1. The increased volume of people via the asylum process granted positive decisions and presenting to the Council for support, this is predominantly for homeless support.
2. Not all who present as homeless will be considered in priority need for instance some single people, which may result in an increase in street homelessness/hardship.
3. The increased pressure on children's social care due to the allocation of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
4. The increased pressure on social care services due to the pace to receive a UASC within five days of a referral.
5. The wider implications/pressures due to the increased pace of cessations for other service areas /partnerships such as health and education.
6. Initial data indicates a higher level of single people than families being granted leave to remain and presenting to the council.
7. The increased pressures on the voluntary and community sector, more people are presenting with longer term support needs.
8. The Home Office requires a response to future resettlement programmes from 2025 by the 15 December 2023 and this will be subject to discussions with relevant Portfolio Leads.
9. The responsibility for future resettlement programmes (safe and legal routes) now rests on the commitment from councils.

Recommendations

The Board are asked to:

- Note the contents of the report for information.
- To consider if a further report is required for the Gateshead System Cares Board and consideration of a Members Seminar.

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