

9 March 2023

TITLE OF REPORT: **National Transfer Scheme (NTS) and
Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)**

REPORT OF: **Helen Fergusson, Strategic Director Children’s
Social Care and Lifelong Learning**

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report provides an overview of the Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) national scheme and Gateshead Local Authorities progress to date.

Background

- 2 In December 2021, the Home Secretary of State directed the transfer of the unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) to Local Authority Care or Support. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) are defined as an individual, who is under 18 when the asylum application is submitted, is not being cared for by an adult who by law has responsibility to do so, is separated from both parents and has applied for asylum in the UK in their own right.

Policy Context

- 3 On the 23rd November 2021, the Minister for Safe and Legal Migration served Local Authorities with notice under Section 72(5) of the Immigration Act 2016 to comply with the National Transfer Scheme. Local Authorities in this region were informed of the number of Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children they would be expected to take under the mandated scheme.
- 4 Since directed transfers under the mandated National Transfer Scheme started in December 2021, the rate of transfers to local authorities with children’s services across the country has significantly increased and it remains critical that the Government take steps to ensure these young people

receive the care placements they are entitled to and end the use of hotels for accommodating arrivals.

- 5 To escape Putin's invasion of Ukraine, an increasing number of Ukrainian children came to the UK under the Homes for Ukraine scheme announced in June 2022. Ukrainian children placed into local authority care are not included as part of the National Transfer Scheme and therefore not counted in the UCAS figures quoted by central government or within this report.

- 6 In August 2022 the Minister for Safe and Legal Migration made the following changes to the National Transfer Scheme:
 - Local Authorities have 5 working days for all transfers of UASC not currently in the care of a local authority, i.e., those children accommodated in hotels by the Home Office.
 - Local Authorities will be provided with an additional £2,000 per month for each child who is transferred from a hotel within 5 working days to local authority care. This funding will be provided for 3 months from the point of transfer.
 - The number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children each local authority is required to care for increased from 0.07% to 0.1% of a local authority's general child population.

- 7 The Home Office have confirmed Gateshead allocation of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children is 39 at any one point in time. Which means when an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child reaches the age of 18 this means another young person is referred by the home office.

- 8 For note in January 2023 the home Office did indicate that the 5 days rule would be wavered and if young people were homed prior to the end of February 2023, we would receive £15,000 per young person. This is to support LA to make progress and to move the young people into their LA before there is an increase in the numbers of young people coming through.

Gateshead's position

- 9 From April 2022 until the end of December 2022, under the mandated scheme Gateshead Council have been allocated 33 young people:
 - 20 young people have a new home in Gateshead.
 - 9 young people were withdrawn by the home office before they arrived in Gateshead and we are not told the reason for their withdrawal.

- We are currently in the process of finding a foster family or flat with support for 4 young people and all young people will have moved in January 2023.
 - All young people were aged between 15 and 18 years old.
 - Most young people have identified their country of origin as Iran or Afghanistan.
 - Most young people identify as males.
 - 9 young people have required a foster carer and the remaining 24 were identified as requiring supported living.
- 10 All of the 33 young people are in some form of education. For those young people who live with their foster carer they attend a local school next to where they live. For those who live in Gateshead they all attend either Gateshead College or Newcastle college. All of the the young people are registered with a GP and all young people have been registered with a dentist and visited and for those who have recently arrived they are awaiting registration with a dentist or their first appointment.
- 11 All young people have a allocated social worker upon arrival in Gateshead who was allocated to them as part of the transfer arrangements. For those young people who are eligible for a personal assistant (PA) to support them with their independent living they are assigned a worker shortly after arrival. All of the young people above who are elegendable for a personal assistant (PA) have one and for those who are too young at the moment will be assigned a PA once they reach the required age.
- 12 Whilst we acknoweldge all unaccompanied asylum-seeking children will have suffered truma and by vertue of the nature in which they have arrived there will be a level of trafficking and expolitation, however unpon arrival there are no ongoing risks of expoliation.
- 13 We are notified by the home office of how many young people will be allocated to Gateshead in each cycle. A cycle is determined by how many young people require transferred at a given point in time. Gateshead have been identified to care for 4 young people in total across cycle 25 to 28, which is the next transfer period. The next transfer period is from mid January to March 2023. We can not forecast how many young people we will receive as this is dependent upon how many young people enter the country. What we do know is once the better weather comes we see a spike in uncompanied young people arriving which carries through the warmer weather before a spike again just ahead of the winter months.
- 14 The timescales set out by the Home Office are one of our biggest challenges as identifying suitable accomodate in time for the unaccompanied asylum-seeking young persons arrival from the interim hotel ready for transfer to

Gateshead. To help us, colleagues from the housing and lettings team are identifying one and two bedded properties which can be prepared ready for their arrival. Based on the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children being referred through at least two priorities are being prepared at any one time. Where possible unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people are befriended and with another unaccompanied asylum-seeking young person and matched to live alongside each other which has proven to reduce social isolation. Whilst we are able to influence some of the Home Office discussion on who we receive this is part of on going discussions in line with the allocations. To date we have had one meeting with the Home Office and two letters where delays in accommodating young people within the 5 days was not met.

- 15 Identifying foster families is a regional challenge and to help us identify more foster carers who can care for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children a regional recruitment campaign. Newcastle and Gateshead Local Authority have been leading on this on behalf of the 12 North East Local Authorities. This campaign also supports the initial training and development of foster carers who will be required to undertake caring responsibilities which may be new to them based on the cultural and religious beliefs held by the young person.
- 16 There will be a further report developed which will look to address the staffing resources required to meet the needs of the young people.

Recommendations

- 17 Overview and Scrutiny are requested to:
 - (a) Note and comment on the information provided in the report;
 - (b) Consider the frequency with which the committee would like to receive future reports

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