

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 23rd March, 2022

2.00 pm

**Council Chamber, Sessions House, County
Hall, Maidstone**





AGENDA

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 23rd March, 2022, at 2.00 pm
Council Chamber, Sessions House, County
Hall, Maidstone

Ask for: **Anna Taylor**
Telephone: **03000 416478**

Membership

Conservative (10): Mr A Booth (Chairman), Mr P V Barrington-King (Vice-Chairman), Mrs R Binks, Mr N J Collor, Mr G Cooke, Mrs S Hudson, Mr D Jeffrey, Mr R C Love, OBE, Mr H Rayner and Mr O Richardson

Labour (1) Dr L Sullivan

Liberal Democrat (1): Mr A J Hook

Green and
Independent (1): Mr P Stepto

Church
Representatives (3): Mr J Constanti, Mr M Reidy and Mr Q Roper

Parent Governor (2): Mr G Godin and Mrs K Moses

County Councillors who are not Members of the Committee but who wish to ask questions at the meeting are asked to notify the Chairman of their questions in advance.

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

(During these items the meeting is likely to be open to the public)

A - Committee Business

- A1 Introduction/Webcast Announcement
- A2 Apologies and Substitutes
- A3 Declarations of Interests by Members in items on the Agenda for this Meeting
- A4 Minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2022 (Pages 1 - 6)
- A5 SEND Transport Update

B - Any items called-in

- B1 21/00124 - Kent Travel Saver Price Increase (Pages 7 - 24)

C - Any items placed on the agenda by any Member of the Council for discussion

- C1 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and Asylum Update (Pages 25 - 36)

D - For Information

- D1 Work Programme (Pages 37 - 40)

EXEMPT ITEMS

(At the time of preparing the agenda there were no exempt items. During any such items which may arise the meeting is likely NOT to be open to the public)

Benjamin Watts
General Counsel
03000 416814

Tuesday, 15 March 2022

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 20 January 2022.

PRESENT: Mr A Booth (Chairman), Mr P V Barrington-King (Vice-Chairman), Mrs R Binks, Mr N J Collor, Mr G Cooke, Mrs S Hudson, Mr D Jeffrey, Mr R C Love, OBE, Mr H Rayner, Mr O Richardson, Dr L Sullivan, Mr A J Hook and Mr P Stepto

ALSO PRESENT: Mr R W Gough (Leader of the Council), Mr P J Oakford (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services) and Mrs C Bell (Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health)

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms Z Cooke (Corporate Director of Finance), Mr B Watts (General Counsel), Mr D Whittle (Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance), Ms L Jackson (Policy and Relationships Adviser), Mrs A Taylor (Scrutiny Research Officer) and Mr M Dentten (Democratic Services Officer)

IN VIRTUAL ATTENDANCE: Mr D Brazier (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport), Miss S Carey (Cabinet Member for Environment), Mrs S Chandler (Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services), Mr M Hill (Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services), Mr D Murphy (Cabinet Member for Economic Development), Mrs S Prendergast (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills), Mr B Sweetland (Cabinet Member for Communications, Engagement, People and Partnerships), Mr D Cockburn (Corporate Director of Strategic and Corporate Services), Ms Z Cooke (Corporate Director of Finance), Mr M Dunkley CBE (Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education), Mr R Smith (Corporate Director of Adult Social Care and Health), Mr S Jones (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport), Mrs A Beer (Corporate Director of People and Communications), Mr D Shipton (Head of Finance Policy, Planning and Strategy) and Ms C Head (Head of Finance Operations)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS**26. Declarations of Interests by Members in items on the Agenda for this Meeting**
(Item A3)

No declarations were made.

27. Minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2021
(Item A4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2021 were an accurate record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

28. Review of Select Committee on Loneliness and Social Isolation Recommendations *(Item A5)*

Mr D Whittle, Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance; and Ms L Jackson, Policy and Relationships Adviser were in attendance and Mr P Lightowler, Interim Director of Transport; and Ms S Sheppard, Communities and Place Lead, Adults Social Care and Health were in virtual attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Bell introduced the update on the Select Committee on Loneliness and Social Isolation's recommendations and proposed actions, noting the previous comments made by the Committee at its October 2021 meeting. She drew Members' attention to the added focus on tackling loneliness and isolation caused by the pandemic. The importance of social prescribing was emphasised, including that it formed a key part of Government's response to loneliness. Clarification on the role of the Civil Societies Strategy in relation to the recommendations was given.
2. When asked by a Member how success would be measured, Mrs Bell agreed to report back to the Committee the progress made against the recommendations, at the appropriate time. Mr Whittle added that monitoring KCC and NHS social isolation data would provide a general indication of progress. The Member asked that the number of people socially prescribed be monitored.
3. In relation to the Connected Communities pilot, a Member asked how outcomes would be monitored. Ms Sheppard gave the reassurance that evaluation of the pilot would be published, with the involvement of the University of Kent, in March 2023.
4. In relation to recommendation 1, 'that Adult Social Care and Health lead further investigations into the prevention or reduction of loneliness and social isolation amongst specific groups of people who are also likely to be impacted,' a Member encouraged the continued monitoring of the progress made to reduce loneliness in vulnerable groups. The continuation of the social prescribing service beyond the pilot, if at all possible, was encouraged.
5. A Member emphasised the need to simplify communication tools for isolated residents, in order to increase accessibility. Reducing the use of technical acronyms, integrating KCC and NHS websites and investing in a signposting helpline were mentioned as possible solutions. Mr Whittle confirmed that work was underway with local NHS partners to simplify signposting, with the aim of reducing duplication and improving access.
6. Mr Lightowler was asked how the Kent Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) impacted the updated recommendations. He confirmed that Kent Karrier, part of the commitments made against recommendation 6, composed part of the Kent BSIP. He informed Members that the draft BSIP was submitted to the Department for Transport (DfT) in October 2021 and that KCC's funding allocation was yet to be confirmed by the Department.

7. The Chairman thanked Mrs Bell and the officers in attendance for their responses and cooperation with the Committee.

RESOLVED to note the proposed approach to tackling social isolation and loneliness set out in the report and the closed action plan.

29. Draft Ten Year Capital Programme, Revenue Budget 2022-23 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2022-25

(Item A6)

Committee consideration based on the draft budget issued 5 January 2022.

1. Mr Oakford introduced the Draft Ten Year Capital Programme, Revenue Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan. In summarising consideration to that point, he noted that as well as briefing Members himself, Cabinet Members had given explanations of the draft budget in relation to their respective portfolios at each Cabinet Committee. He confirmed that Finance had worked closely with Cabinet Members and Corporate Directors throughout the drafting process. He outlined the proposed council tax increase, which amounted to an increase of 2.99%, and confirmed that its core purpose was to cover demand led cost pressures. He recognised that there could be a requirement to make further cost savings if future Local Government Finance Settlements did not increase to reflect changes in demand. He emphasised that any future cost savings would involve individual public consultations and executive key decisions. Budget risks were addressed and the importance of continued in-year budget monitoring recognised. Members were informed that a £20m in-year revenue budget overspend was anticipated for the 2021/22 financial year, which would be accounted for through a drawdown of reserves. He mentioned that Government were analysing the funding methodology for the next two financial years.
2. Mr Gough contextualised the draft budget in relation to key developments over the previous financial year, which included Government Covid-19 grant funding and significant changes to service demand and case complexity. The aim of the Medium-Term Financial Plan, to maintain a stable finance position and operations, was highlighted.
3. Members asked a range of questions in relation to the Draft Ten Year Capital Programme, Revenue Budget 2022-23 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2022-25. Key issues raised by the Committee and responded to by Cabinet included the following:
 - a. A Member asked for assurance from the Corporate Director of Finance, as the Section 151 Officer, that KCC was in a financially sustainable position, especially when the drawdown of reserves was considered. Ms Cooke reassured the Committee that she was satisfied that the proposals and use of reserves over the next two years were financially sustainable. She reminded Members that her Section 25 Assurance Statement, on the robustness of the budget proposals and Medium-

Term Financial Plan, would be presented to County Council at its budget meeting on 10 February 2022. She acknowledged that there were tangible risks in years 2 and 3 of the Medium-Term Financial Plan. Regarding the maintenance of reserves, she cited the intention to maintain a revenue budget to reserve ratio of 5%. Mr Gough noted that the general reserve had increased in size over recent years.

- b. Mr Oakford was asked to explain his strategy regarding the future use of reserves and was encouraged to avoid funding discretionary spending from reserves. He stressed that reserves would be used as a last resort and addressed the use of reserves in the 2021/22 finance year which was termed as a loan against future savings. He further emphasised the need to pursue a 5% reserve policy. He committed to avoid further discretionary spending, unless absolutely necessary.
- c. In relation to nationwide energy price increases, a Member asked for details of KCC's energy expenditure and measures undertaken to decrease usage. Mr Oakford confirmed that KCC's energy was supplied by Laser Energy and through forward buying. He noted that energy savings were part of the Strategic Reset Programme (SRP) and reminded the Committee that a Member Briefing would be held on 21 January to explain the Programme further. He recognised that reducing the authority's estate would further reduce energy consumption and costs. Miss Carey spoke on KCC's investment in renewable energy, she reminded Members that £20.6m had been received from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy's (BEIS) Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS), with a series of projects underway and planned, which included new solar farms. She explained the future environmental and financial benefits to Kent.
- d. Following a question from a Member on the management of KCC's debt, Mr Oakford confirmed that 15% would be paid off in the next 10 years. He asserted that any further increase to the level of debt was to be avoided. He informed Members that a significant proportion, approximately £300m, of KCC's debt was sourced from internal borrowing, which was treated similarly to external debt, with different interest rates. Mr Oakford shared his satisfaction at the quality of the authority's overall treasury management.
- e. A Member asked Mr Oakford whether he was confident that inflationary cost pressures had been adequately accounted for and mitigated against. Mr Oakford recognised the impact of inflation on service and commissioning costs and asserted that he did not expect inflation to be a long-term challenge. In relation to facilities management, he confirmed that cost increases had been factored into the contract tender. Mr Shipton advised that contracts with inflation indices had been included in the draft budget, with average commissioning cost increases of 3% forecast.

- f. Mr Oakford was asked to explain KCC's use of external consultants. He confirmed that consultants were used by the authority in three capacities: for strategy; as interim staff; and as fixed term specialists. He committed to review their use in order to minimise cost where possible.
 - g. A Member sought assurances that the review of Open Access services would appropriately engage stakeholders and be undertaken by qualified professionals in the field. Mrs Chandler reassured Members that the review would involve extensive consultation between the appropriate professionals, staff and young people.
 - h. An explanation of the sources of future savings was sought by a Member. Mr Oakford highlighted the areas for future savings, as detailed in the draft budget report. Following Member concerns, Mr Oakford reassured the Committee that an open public consultation had taken place in advance of the draft budget's publication and reiterated that individual public consultations would be carried out ahead of future savings.
 - i. A Member asked what impact was expected as a result of the planned cessation of the homeless support contract from September 2022. Mr Oakford confirmed that the cessation was due to the expiration of the contract and informed Members that support for homeless residents was the responsibility of district councils. He confirmed that funds would be available to support the transition period. Mr Gough noted that the contract was funded by a one-off Government grant.
 - j. A Member asked for an explanation of the proposed Kent Travel Saver pass price increase, accounted for in the draft budget. Mr Oakford confirmed that the saving represented a reduction in subsidy, that the subsidy was a discretionary spend, and reminded Members that the price increase would be a separate key decision taken by the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport. He added that KCC were the only authority outside of London to offer a subsidised children's travel saver pass. He recognised the impact of the change and stressed the need to ensure that statutory services were delivered to the best of the authority's ability. Further reassurance was given that Cabinet Members would continue to work closely with officers to ensure that savings had as little impact on residents as possible.
 - k. Following a question from a Member, Mr Oakford confirmed that the Contract Management Review Board would be re-established, with Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance, Mr Cooper as its Chair.
4. Members stressed the need for an extensive publicity campaign to clearly explain the reasons for the proposed council tax increase and budget savings.

5. The Chairman reminded Members that Cabinet received regular updates on in-year revenue spending, which were publicly available, and encouraged Members to monitor developments. He recognised the pressure on Cabinet Members to maintain quality services within their portfolios, whilst ensuring good value for money.
6. The draft capital and revenue budgets were not noted by Dr Sullivan.

RESOLVED to note the draft capital and revenue budgets including responses to consultation.

30. Any other business

1. A Member asked that in-year revenue budget monitoring be added to the work programme. Members emphasised the need to avoid Scrutiny duplicating the work of the Governance and Audit Committee.
2. Mr Barrington King gave an update on the Home to School Transport Short Focused Inquiry. He confirmed that the final inquiry session had taken place and that the draft report was considered by Members ahead of the final decision at Scrutiny in March. He commended all Members involved for their contributions and time given to the inquiry.

By: Anna Taylor – Scrutiny Research Officer
To: Scrutiny Committee – 23 March 2022
Subject: Call-in of Decision 21/00124 Kent Travel Saver Price Increase

Background

1. On 2 March 2022 the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation agreed to increase the cost of the standard Kent Travel Saver from £370 per academic year to £450 (Decision 21/000124 paperwork appended). Previous to this decision being taken it was discussed by members of the Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee on 18 February 2022.
2. Following the decision being taken, a call-in request was submitted by Ms Dawkins, supported by Mr Hood, thus meeting the requirements for any call-in to be supported by a minimum of two Members from different political Groups.
3. The reasons of the call-in were duly considered by the Scrutiny Officer and determined to be valid under the call-in arrangements set out in the Constitution.

KCC Constitution – section 17.72

Members can call-in a decision for one or more of the following reasons:

- (a) The decision is not in line with the Council's Policy Framework,
- (b) The decision is not in accordance with the Council's Budget,
- (c) The decision was not taken in accordance with the principles of decision making set out in 8.5, and/or
- (d) The decision was not taken in accordance with the arrangements set out in Section 12.

4. The detailed reasons given by Ms Dawkins and supported by Mr Hood under the call-in criteria (listed above) are set out below.

- 4.1 (a) The decision is not in line with the Council's Policy Framework

“KCC has certain policy within its climate commitments to make a move to more sustainable modes of transport and encourage the modal shift to persuade residents to decrease the use of the car to get around.

It is my belief that this goes against this policy demonstrated in the KMLES strategy and its implementation plan as well as targets in the Environment strategy.

The decision by the administration to increase the cost of KTS is going to have a financial impact on families and therefore will need to find other means to get to school such as by car.

Kent and Medway low emissions strategy

PRIORITY 6: TRANSPORT, TRAVEL AND DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY Set up a smart connectivity and mobility modal shift programme – linking sustainable transport, transport innovations, active travel, virtual working, broadband, digital services, artificial intelligence and behaviour change

6.8 Trial and implement projects that support modal shift away from car ownership and/or reduce car dependency (Page 15)

6.1 Review business mileage, set challenging reduction targets in light of COVID ways of working and expand sustainable travel polices that reduce the need to travel, encourage modal shift to active travel/public transport or increase car sharing. (Page 16)

Kent Environment Strategy

P37 TARGETS Targets are under review, they will initially focus on monitoring modal shift to sustainable and active travel options. INDICATORS • School and business travel survey data • Rail station footfall • Traffic counts • Bus usage and smarter challenge survey”.

Process

5. The Cabinet Member and relevant Officers will be attending the Scrutiny Committee meeting to present their response to the call-in, no additional written report has been requested due to the short length of time between the approval of the call-in and the Scrutiny Committee meeting date.
6. The Scrutiny Committee should consider the reasons set out by the Members calling-in the decision and the response from the Executive, giving due attention to the information made available during questioning and discussion on this item.

Options for the Scrutiny Committee

7. The Scrutiny Committee may:
 - a) make no comments
 - b) express comments but not require reconsideration of the decision
 - c) require implementation of the decision to be postponed pending reconsideration of the matter by the decision-maker in light of the Committee’s comments; or
 - d) require implementation of the decision to be postponed pending review or scrutiny of the matter by the full Council.

Appendix

[Decision - 21/00124 - Kent Travel Saver Price Increase](#)

[Record of Decision \(kent.gov.uk\)](#)

[THE REPORT \(kent.gov.uk\)](#)

[Equality Analysis/Impact Assessment \(EqIA\)](#)

Background Documents

[Agenda for Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee on Friday, 18th February, 2022, 2.00 pm \(kent.gov.uk\)](#)

Report Author

Anna Taylor
Scrutiny Research Officer
Anna.taylor@kent.gov.uk
03000 416478

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KENT COUNTY COUNCIL –RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TAKEN BY:

David Brazier , Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport

DECISION NO:

21/00124

For publication

Key decision: YES

Subject Matter / Title of Decision: Kent Travel Saver Price Increase

Decision:

As Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation, I agree to increase the cost of the standard Kent Travel Saver from £370 per academic year to £450.

Reason(s) for decision:

Since 2015, as set out in Cabinet Decision 15/00051, any increase to the cost of what was the Young Persons Travel Pass (YPTP) and is now the Kent Travel Saver (KTS), has been capped at 5% of the gross cost of the scheme.

The scale of the financial challenge facing the authority in 2022/23 is such, that the Kent Travel Saver, being a discretionary scheme, needs to reduce its net cost.

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

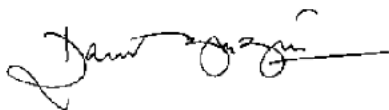
The proposal was discussed by members of the Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee on 18 February 2022 and endorsed by 11 votes to 3.

Any alternatives considered and rejected:

To increase keep the increase within 5% of the gross cost of the scheme – this was rejected as it would not reduce the net cost of the scheme to mitigate budget saving pressures.

Any interest declared when the decision was taken and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer:

None



2 March 2022

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signed

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date

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From: Philip Lightowler, Interim Director Transportation
To: David Brazier, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport
Subject: **Kent Travel Saver Price Increase**

Key decision 21/00124

Electoral Division: Countywide

Summary: Since 2015 a Cabinet decision has been in place, governing the level of cost increase that can be made to the Kent Travel Saver card.

Due to the budget challenge facing the authority, this paper proposes an above inflation price rise of £80 to £450 for the standard pass.

This rise is designed to lower the subsidy that KCC provide to the scheme by reducing its net cost.

All other elements of the scheme would remain.

This price increase is proposed to be effective from the opening of the 2022/23 academic year Kent Travel Saver application window, in early June 2022.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport is asked agreed to increase the cost of the standard Kent Travel Saver from £370 per academic year to £450 as shown at Appendix A.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Kent Travel Saver is a concessionary travel product, available to those students in years 7-11 and residing in Kent. It has been provided by the authority since 2007, under different names such as the Kent Freedom Pass and the Young Persons Travel Pass.
- 1.2 The pass provides the holder, free bus travel across Kent, from 06.00 to 19.00, with no limits on services used and at no cost on boarding. In addition to the core offering some operators, at no cost to KCC, provide additional free travel at weekends; (Stagecoach and Arriva).
- 1.3 The participating operators are re-imbursed using a published mechanism based on the principle of being “no better/no worse off” if the scheme was not in place. The re-imburement of the operators forms the gross costs of the scheme.
- 1.4 The gross costs of the scheme are netted off by the income generated.
- 1.5 To access the pass, there is an annual scheme cost, with a reduced rate for those on low income and it is free to those in selected care groups. In addition,

there is a sibling offer, where those households with more than 2 children eligible for the pass can access additional passes at no charge.

- 1.6 Currently the pass cost is £370 (standard) and £120 for (low income). The annual charge can be paid upfront or through monthly instalments.
- 1.7 The benefit that a pass holder will receive depends on how much use they make of the pass, where they travel to/from and the operator fares in that area. Typically, operator tickets, of this nature and covering the same period, range in price from £600 to £1,000. On this basis, the pass, including this price increase, continues to provide a significant saving over an operator ticket.
- 1.8 As of October 2021, there are 13,968 full cost pass payers, 1,804 low-income cost pass payers, 390 sibling offer passes and 3,626 in receipt of free passes.

2. Key Decision – KTS Pass Uplift 2022-23

- 2.1 Since 2015, as set out in Cabinet Decision 15/00051, any increase to the cost of what was the Young Persons Travel Pass (YPTP) and is now the Kent Travel Saver (KTS), has been capped at 5% of the gross cost of the scheme.
- 2.2 The scale of the financial challenge facing the authority in 2022/23 is such, that the Kent Travel Saver, being a discretionary scheme, needs to reduce its net cost.
- 2.3 This paper seeks a new key decision to the existing decision. The decision required is set out below:
 - Increase the cost of the standard pass from £370 to £450
 - Retain the cost of the low-income pass at £120
 - Retain the sibling offer
 - Retain the care pass offer
 - Retain instalments

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 The proposed increase in the cost of the pass is estimated to deliver circa £910K in additional income beyond anticipated operator inflation.
- 3.2 For the standard pass £15 is for operator inflation and £65 contributes to the reduction in scheme cost.
- 3.3 The price increase enables a budget of £11.5M gross cost offset by £6.8M of income to give a net cost of £4.7M to Kent County Council for 2022/23.

4. Legal implications

- 4.1 No implications have been identified.

5. Equalities implications

5.1 An initial EqIA has been completed. No significant impacts on a group with a protected characteristic have been identified.

6. Other corporate implications

6.1 No other corporate implications have been identified.

7. Governance

7.1 Not applicable

8. Conclusions

8.1 Since 2015 a Cabinet decision has been in place, governing the level of cost increase that can be made to the Kent Travel Saver card.

8.2 Due to the budget challenge facing the authority, this paper proposes an above inflation price rise of £80 to £450 for the standard pass.

8.3 This rise is designed to lower the subsidy that KCC provide to the scheme by reducing its net cost.

8.4 All other elements of the scheme would remain.

8.5 These price increases are proposed to be effective from the opening of the 2022/23 academic year Kent Travel Saver application window, in early June 2022.

9. Recommendation(s):
The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport is asked agreed to increase the cost of the standard Kent Travel Saver from £370 per academic year to £450 as shown at Appendix A.

10. Background Documents

- 10.1 Record of Decision
- 10.2 Equality Impact Assessment

11. Contact details

Report Author: Philip Lightowler Interim Director of Highways and Transportation Telephone number: 03000 414073 Email : philip.ligtowler@kent.gov.uk	Relevant Director: Simon Jones, Corporate Director for Growth, Environment and Transport Telephone number: 03000 413479 Email : simon.jones@kent.gov.uk
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KCC - Growth, Environment and Transport Directorate (GET).
Equality Analysis / Impact Assessment (EqIA) template

Name of decision, policy, procedure, project or service: KCC Travel Saver Cost Increase.

Brief description of policy, procedure, project or service

The KCC Travel Saver (KTS) is a subsidised bus pass scheme provided by KCC which can save up to 50% of the costs on travel to school.

The KTS is for students in academic years 7-11 and once issued the pass provided free at the point of use travel on all public buses from 6am to 7pm, Mondays to Fridays throughout the academic year from September to July. In addition, some operators also accept the pass as valid for travel at other times i.e. at evenings, on weekends and in the Summer Holidays.

The scheme is administered as a concessionary travel scheme whereby KCC have to reimburse operators for every journey made using a pass reflecting the fare that they would otherwise have received from the parent. At the current rates, the costs of reimbursing operators exceeds the income received through the application fee by about £6m per annum which reflects the subsidy allocated to parents and the overall costs of the scheme to KCC.

Financial pressures placed on KCC's budget mean that the Council face an intensely challenging period ahead, when tough decisions will need to be taken to guarantee services for our most vulnerable residents. The impact of this does unfortunately necessitate that the Council is having to consider savings measures across a whole range of services. The budget set by the Council for the 2022/23 financial year, includes a reduction in funding available to subsidise parents of (circa. £1m) and it is therefore necessary to increase the application fees to off-set this and ensure that the scheme can continue to be sustained.

Date Document Updated 02/03/2022

1

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It is therefore proposed to adjust the cost of the standard Kent Travel Saver from £370 per academic year to £450 and to increase the cost of the low-income Kent Travel Saver from £120 per academic year to £150. All other concessions such as the provision for free passes and the sibling (buy 2 and get the 3rd and 4th passes for free) would continue unchanged. The ability to spread the cost by paying through a series of instalments would also be maintained.

It should be noted that separate consideration will be given to the costs of the KCC 16+ Travel Saver scheme which is not therefore covered by this EQIA.

Aims and Objectives

The proposed increase in the cost of the pass is estimated to deliver circa £964K in additional income beyond anticipated operator inflation. The price increase enables a budget of £11.5M gross cost offset by £6.8M of income to give a net cost of £4.7M to Kent County Council for 2022/23 enabling the scheme to be sustained within the available budget.

JUDGEMENT

Continue : any increase to the costs of a support service will undoubtedly cause a greater degree of hardship to all who access the service and this will include some greater impact to some protected groups. This is the case in this instance, although it is also noted that the proposed increase in pass costs is designed to protect the scheme to ensure that financial support can be maintained for all passholders. In this context, the continuation of the scheme, even at increased costs, continues to have a positive impact for all service users by comparison with it becoming unsustainable and ceasing to exist.

I have found the Adverse Equality Impact Rating to be LOW as whilst there are some greater impacts to protected groups, these are identified as limited to those only in a disabled category. It is also considered that the changes are designed to ensure that the scheme can be sustained and continue to have a positive impact for all users by comparison with it ceasing altogether.

GET Document Control


Revision History

Version	Date	Authors	Comment
V0.1	14.01.22	Steve Pay	First Draft

Document Sign-Off (this must be both the relevant Head of Service and the relevant Director)

Attestation

I have read and paid due regard to the Equality Analysis/Impact Assessment. I agree with the actions to mitigate any adverse impact(s) that has /have been identified.

Name	Signature	Title	Date of Issue
Phil Lightowler		Interim Director of Highways and Transportation	19.01.22

Date Document Updated 02/03/2022

3

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Part 1 - Screening

Regarding the decision, policy, procedure, project or service under consideration,

Could this policy, procedure, project or service, or any proposed changes to it, affect any Protected Group (listed below) less favourably (negatively) than others in Kent?

Could this policy, procedure, project or service promote equal opportunities for this group?

Please note that there is no justification for direct discrimination; and indirect discrimination will need to be justified according to the legal requirements

Protected Group	You MUST provide a brief commentary as to your findings, or this EqIA will be returned to you unsigned			
	High Negative Impact	Medium Negative Impact	Low Negative Impact	High/Medium/Low Favourable Impact
Age			The scheme is available only to those in a lower aged group, namely those of secondary school, age. With the parents of passholders also not expected to be of a more senior age, there is considered to be little impact on this protected group.	

Disability		The ability for children to travel to school, independently is arguably more important in the context of a disabled parent who could have less means of supporting travel to school themselves.		
Sex	None	None	None	None
Gender identity/ Transgender	None	None	None	None
Race	None	None	None	None
Religion and Belief	None	None	None	None
Sexual Orientation	None	None	None	None
Pregnancy and Maternity	None	None	None	None
Marriage and Civil Partnerships	None	None	None	None
Carer's Responsibilities	None	None	None	Passes will continue to be provided free of charge to Young

				Carers of eligible age thus providing significant support for this characteristic.
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Part 3 - Action Plan

Protected Characteristic	Issues identified	Action to be taken	Expected outcomes	Owner	Timescale	Resource implications
Disability	The ability for children to travel to school, independently is arguably more important in the context of a disabled parent who could have less means of supporting travel to school themselves.	Positive action is difficult given the stated financial needs to reduce costs. It should be noted that maintenance of the scheme and the offer for Young Carers continues to offer support for this group.	Maintenance of the Scheme	Steve Pay	Ongoing .	None

Page 23

Have the actions been included in your business/ service plan?

Yes

Date Document Updated 02/03/2022

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From: Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services
Matt Dunkley, CBE, Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education

To: Scrutiny Committee – 23rd March 2022

Subject: **UASC and Asylum Update since 10th September 2021**

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary:	<p>This report provides the Scrutiny Committee with an overview of how Kent County Council has undertaken its corporate parenting responsibilities for newly arrived unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) since the protocol between Kent County Council, Home Office and Department for Education(DfE) was initiated on 10th September 2021 and a mandated National Transfer Scheme became operational on 14th December 2021.</p> <p>It outlines the different schemes offered through Government, the local authorities' involvement and funding received to help families with resettlement and integration including Community Sponsorship.</p>
Recommendation:	<p>Members of the Scrutiny Committee are asked to NOTE the number of UASC Kent County Council has accommodated since 10th September 2021 and the significant contribution this has made to reducing the number of UASC in hotels used by the Home Office since Summer 2021. Without the protocol between Kent County Council, Home Office and Department for Education, supported by a mandated National Transfer Scheme, this demand would have had a significant impact upon Kent County Council's ability to meet its corporate parenting responsibilities for both its UASC and citizen children. Members are also asked to note the refugee resettlement that is taking place within Kent under official government schemes</p>

UASC in Kent

1. Introduction

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to provide the Scrutiny Committee with an overview of how Kent County Council has undertaken its corporate parenting responsibilities for newly arrived unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) since the protocol between Kent County Council, Home Office and Department for Education was initiated on 10th September 2021 and a mandated National Transfer Scheme became operational on 14th December 2021. This report follows the All Member Briefing held in September 2021 and commitment to present an update to the Scrutiny Committee in the Spring of 2022.

2. Background

- 2.1** With the significant increase in numbers of UASC in 2015, the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) was established as an addendum to the 2016 Immigration Act to alleviate this National responsibility from falling predominantly on Kent and a small number of other Gateway local authorities. As a result, total of 317 children were transferred from Kent to other local authorities between July 2016 and March 2018, when Kent was forced to pause its participation in the scheme. Long delays for children and young people with local authorities not volunteering to accept responsibility resulted in Kent County Council not being able to meet its corporate parenting responsibilities for these children to the standards we felt were right. Consequently between March 2018 and June 2020 the Council took responsibility for all UASC presenting within its borders. This period also coincided with numbers falling following the clearing of the Calais camps, increased security at the Channel Tunnel and greater vigilance by the French Authorities at the Border, which made it possible for KCC to do this.
- 2.2** Numbers began to rise significantly again in late 2019 with small boat landings becoming more common place, and a request was made in January 2020 to the Home Office to return to transferring children under the NTS. Under the voluntary NTS scheme no offers were received to take children from Kent until June 2020. By the 17th August 2020 numbers of UASC in the Council's care were so high, and the speed of arrivals so fast (including 50 taken into care in one weekend), that the professional advice from the Corporate Director was that it represented a threat to our capacity to meet our statutory duty to give a safe level of care to all of the UASC, citizen children in care and vulnerable children we are responsible for. This was reflected in caseloads for social workers and IROs which were unsustainable.
- 2.3** In addition Covid 19 quarantine and isolation laws were also in force, placing an even greater pressure on the Council's ability to safely care for new arrivals. The decision was therefore reluctantly made by the Leader and Lead Member to temporarily cease accepting any new UASC arrivals from the port of Dover. Those children not placed with Kent during this period were safely relocated by the Home Office to other local authorities across England and Scotland who had more capacity to care for them, on a voluntary basis.
- 2.4** On 7th December 2020, the Council returned to accommodating newly arrived UASC but by 14th June 2021 numbers had risen significantly once more and we found ourselves in the same situation as we had done in August 2020. Despite having the power to mandate the National Transfer Scheme, Government chose not to do so preferring to rely on a voluntary rota which persistently failed to meet need and keep up with the demand.
- 2.5** On 10th September 2021 a protocol was signed between Kent County Council, the Home Office and Department for Education. This outlined how the Council would maintain its 0.07% threshold for UASC (242) in its Child in Care Service whilst its Reception and Safe Care Service has a capacity for a further 120 UASC. The vast majority of these 120 would transfer under the NTS within 10 working days.
- 2.6** On 23rd November 2021 the Government announced the National Transfer Scheme was being made mandatory for UK local authorities, which became operational on 14th December 2021. However, it was not until February 2022 that all local authorities in England and the

Home Nations were finally directed to take newly arrived UASC into their care. All UK local authorities under their 0.07% threshold are now legally required to accept NTS transfers.

3. Intake of UASC since 10th September 2021

3.1 This table shows the numbers of UASC referred to Kent County Council per month and year.

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
January	31	36	16	17	10	13	16	108
February	15	28	11	8	11	39	15	91
March	31	34	23	7	29	35	59	28*
April	16	48	12	3	15	38	38	
May	41	30	12	6	18	64	115	
June	105	32	27	20	26	85	63	
July	178	49	14	19	43	68	6	
August	127	42	25	17	44	97	9	
September	102	43	16	12	24	-	90	
October	211	19	19	11	40	-	96	
November	49	11	23	30	24	1	127	
December	40	18	12	12	48	38	96	
TOTAL	946	390	211	162	332	478	730	227

*at 7th March 2022

3.2 This table illustrates the pace Kent County Council has accommodated UASC since 10th September 2021 in comparison to months and years prior to the protocol. Kent County Council has accommodated 636* since 10th September 2021 and is on course to accommodate more UASC between September 2021 and September 2022 than it has in any previous 12-month period. This has significantly contributed to the reduction of UASC in hotels, used by the Home Office since Summer 2021. In September 2021 there were over 200 UASC across 5 hotels. By February 2022 all hotels were briefly emptied, with Kent County Council accommodating the last remaining UASC. Unfortunately, improved weather conditions for small boat Channel crossings have meant this was temporary.

3.3 The demographics of UASC accommodated by Kent County Council since 10th September 2021 is consistent with that seen in Kent and nationally pre-protocol e.g., predominantly males, aged 15-17 years old, from countries including Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Sudan, Eritrea. Approximately 25% have been under 16 and 75% aged 16-17 years old, which is also consistent with pre-protocol figures. However, there has been a change in the percentage of UASC aged under 16 remaining in Kent long-term.

3.4 Every month young people that form Kent County Council's 0.07% threshold for UASC (242) will turn 18 and no longer count towards this quota. In order to maintain 242 UASC the Reception and Safe Care Service refers some UASC to the Child in Care Service to remain in Kent County Council's care long-term.

3.5 This table shows the numbers of UASC that have not been referred for NTS transfer each month, and have therefore remained as a Kent Child in Care, since the protocol and those aged under 16 and those aged 16-17 years old.

	No. remaining in Kent	Under 16	16-17
September 2021	15	12	3
October 2021	10	5	5
November 2021	18	16	2
December 2021	11	2	9
January 2022	17	16	1
February 2022	8	5	3
March 2022*	13	5	8
TOTAL	92	61 (66%)	31 (34%)

*at 7th March 2022

3.6 The reasons for more under 16 UASCs remaining in Kent long-term since the protocol include these being the youngest and most vulnerable and it being in their best interests to not have multiple placements and delay in care planning, which a NTS transfer causes when it continues to fail to identify appropriate placements and transfer children and young people in a timely way.

3.7 There are also operational challenges for moving young people out of reception centres, which include sufficiency of independent accommodation and time required to prepare UASC to live independently (the model for this is 8 weeks). Maintaining available bedspace at reception centres is critical to meeting the demand and pace of NTS transfers, when the majority of UASC are males aged 16-17 years old. The Reception and Safe Care Service is working with Kent County Council's independent accommodation provider, Ready Homes, and Kent County Council's Strategic Commissioning to better manage the challenges outlined above.

4. NTS transfers since 10th September 2021

4.1 This table shows NTS transfers per month since June 2020

	2020	2021	2022
January	-	14	44
February	-	18	74
March	-	36	29*
April	-	14	
May	-	21	
June	48	50	
July	37	24	
August	44	6	
September	47	11	
October	11	69	
November	2	89	
December	11	83	
TOTAL	200	435	147

*at 7th March 2022

4.2 This table illustrates how the rate of NTS transfers has increased since the protocol and the mandating of the NTS with 399 UASC transferring between 10th September 2021 and 7th March 2022. This compares to 383 NTS transfers completed between 1st June 2020 and 9th September 2021 and 317 NTS transfers completed between July 2016 and March 2018.

4.3 Not all 636 UASC referred to Kent County Council since 10th September 2021 have been referred for NTS transfer. This table shows a breakdown of the 636.

Transferred on NTS	399
Awaiting NTS transfer	92
Remaining in Kent	92
Turned 18 in under 13 weeks	8
Family reunification	15
Age dispute preventing NTS transfer	3
Missing before NTS transfer	22
Referrals received between 1 st and 9 th September 2021	5
TOTAL	636*

*at 7th March 2022

4.4 Whilst the rate of NTS transfers has increased since the protocol, so has demand. The protocol has and continues to safeguard Kent County Council's services from becoming overwhelmed through this persistent demand. The limit to which UASC can be referred to Kent County Council has provided an impetus on the NTS to achieve transfers for UASC in Kent so capacity in its Reception and Safe Care Service is maintained for new UASC referrals.

4.5 The protocol states UASC referred to Kent County Council must physically transfer to the care of another local authority within 10 working days. This is also a requirement of the now mandatory NTS. However, NTS transfer timescales for UASC in Kent remain variable.

4.6 This table shows the range and average timescales for NTS transfers since the protocol. Whilst the range of timescales is improving and the overall average is a significant improvement on pre-protocol timescales, it remains above 10 working days.

	Shortest wait for NTS transfer (working days)	Longest wait for NTS transfer (working days)	Average wait for NTS transfer (working days)
September 2021	Less than 24 hours	86	23
October 2021	1	102	16
November 2021	1	78	17
December 2021	Less than 24 hours	77	18
January 2022	Less than 24 hours	32	14
February 2022	Less than 24 hours	30	8
March 2022*	-	-	-
TOTAL (average)	Less than 24 hours	68	14

*at 7th March 2022

4.7 This table shows how this variety in timescales equates to almost 50% of UASC in Kent waiting longer than 10 working days for an NTS transfer.

	% Under 10 working days	% Over 10 working days	% Pending
September 2021	28%	72%	0%
October 2021	52%	48%	0%
November 2021	52%	48%	0%
December 2021	45%	55%	0%
January 2022	28%	72%	0%
February 2022	30%	35%	35%
March 2022*	0%	0%	100%
TOTAL (average)	34%	47%	19%

*at 7th March 2022

5. Corporate parenting responsibilities post-protocol

5.1 The accommodation and support provided to UASC referred to Kent County Council since the protocol remains largely the same as it was pre-protocol. All UASC have the status of Children in Care to Kent County Council, are allocated social workers, visited within statutory timescales, and provided with the same level of care and support in their placements. Kent County Council is not accommodating UASC in settings different from those used pre-protocol. All immediate health and care needs for newly arrived children and young people are met by the Council under their Section 20 duties of the Children Act.

5.2 The primary difference post-protocol in the Reception and Safe Care Service is that duties under Section 22 of the Children Act, which pertain to long term care planning are not initiated until the children and young people have been with us for 10 working days. Pre-protocol these were made at the point of the UASC entering the Council's care, as is the case for all children entering care. This change is because the objective of the protocol, now a legal requirement of the mandatory NTS, is for all NTS transfers to complete by 10 working days. Kent County Council's Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service and NHS Kent and Medway's Looked After Children's Team are updated weekly on all UASC, including those who have not transferred by 10 working days. This is so these assessments and reviews can be booked as soon as possible from 10 working days.

5.3 Children and young people are significantly impacted by a delay in their transfer, not being able to settle and put down roots in their new communities. However local authority and health services are also impacted by delay as care planning work has to be started by day 10 but is often not subsequently needed or is not relevant as young people move on before any of the actions such as full health assessments and education placements can be fulfilled.

5.4 In recognition of the demand and pace of NTS transfers since the protocol the Council has developed a specialist IRO role for the Reception and Safe Care Service. This new post was appointed to on 10th February 2022 and the successful candidate will be in

post by 14th March 2022. This specialist IRO will provide dedicated independent quality assurance of the care and accommodation provided for UASC in Kent's Reception and Safe Care Service. This will ensure Kent County Council's corporate parenting responsibilities are maintained for UASC post-protocol.

6. Funding Arrangements

6.1 All local authorities who accommodate their 0.07% quota of UASC, or who receive UASC from an authority via above their 0.07% via the NTS quota, receive the higher level of funding. This is the case for Kent and is always applied to the 242 UASC who remain in Kent as their permanent placement. A separate funding stream has been agreed with the Home Office to fund the Reception and Safe Care Service which recognises the volatility in numbers of this arrangement and ensures that core costs for having reception centre accommodation and foster care permanently available are covered.

6.2 Funding for Care Leavers was increased in June 2021 and is fully claimed for all Kent's UASC Care leavers which now number 1100. For those individuals who are given leave to remain, allowing them access to work, college and universal welfare benefits this funding stream is sufficient to meet costs. However, there remains a small but significant group of UASC Care leavers whose immigration status is unresolved as they turn 18. In these cases, the Council must continue to provide all means of financial support to them, which in turn creates a financial deficit which must be met. We are working closely with the Home Office to highlight these cases and ask for them to be prioritised, but capacity issues within Government mean that new arrivals who turn 18 within a short time of coming into our care do not receive an immigration decision in a timely way.

7. Refugee Resettlement in Kent under the official Government schemes

7.1 Since 2015 Kent has participated in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS) and, since Spring 2021, its successor, the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS). These are both official Government resettlement schemes that allow refugees to settle in the UK with full rights to work, study, rent, claim benefits and other public funds. In early 2021 the number of individuals resettled under the VPRS nationally exceeded 20,000, the original target for 2020. The UKRS is almost identical to the VPRS but resettles refugees from anywhere in the world.

7.2 February 2022, 115 families (approximately 600 individuals) will have been resettled in Kent under the VPRS and UKRS. Further families are expected in the coming months. The overwhelming majority are from Syria, but other nationalities are now starting to be resettled in Kent, including from Sudan and Iraq. To date Kent has resettled about 20% of the South East total.

7.3 Over the last five years KCC and the twelve housing authorities have been working in partnership to resettle Syrian and other refugees under the VPRS and UKRS. The housing authorities are responsible for deciding on the number of families to be resettled in their areas and on the suitability of specific properties. In ten of the twelve districts, KCC then provides coordination and liaison with the Government resettlement team and also commissions (and oversees) the resettlement and integration support from Migrant Help, Clarion and Rethink. The two exceptions are Ashford and Canterbury who provide the support from within their own housing and community teams.

8. Schemes for supporting Afghans following the evacuation in 2021

8.1 Members will be aware, around 15,000 individuals arrived in the UK last summer as part of the Operation Pitting evacuation from Afghanistan. Since then, there have been additional arrivals from countries surrounding Afghanistan, in particular Pakistan.

8.2 The evacuees including Afghans were given permission to reside in the UK under the Locally Employed Staff (LES)/Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP), other Afghans were supported under the wider Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme and a limited number of eligible British citizens and their families.

8.3 Afghans who qualify under the LES/ARAP route are individuals (and their families) who have worked in some capacity for the British Government, including the MOD (for example interpreters). The wider ACRS prioritises those who have assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan, stood up for values such as democracy, women's rights and freedom of speech, and vulnerable people, including women and girls at risk, and members of minority groups at risk. The Government has stated that this scheme will resettle up to 20,000 people. Spouses, partners, and dependent children under the age of 18 will be eligible for the scheme and other family members may be eligible in exceptional circumstances.

8.4 Those who qualify for the above schemes are in the process of being given Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR). Most entered with a more limited form of leave, but this is in the process of being changed to ILR and Biometric Residence Permits issued. Their status (whether limited leave or ILR) allows them to work, rent, claim benefits and other public funds. They will eventually be able to apply for citizenship.

8.5 On arrival families are housed in a quarantine/isolation hotel for 10 days (at the moment this is continuing). After that the majority spend time in a temporary bridging hotel until more long-term accommodation can be found for them by local authorities (in Kent this is in private sector accommodation). Unfortunately, due to the difficulties finding move-on accommodation across the UK, a very high percentage of families remain in bridging hotels.

8.6 In Kent, as of March 2022, there are three bridging hotels being used. These have been in use since the evacuation last summer and currently support 302 individuals (nearly all families with children). The hotels were procured by the Home Office but the wraparound support is provided by the local authorities (district and KCC resettlement teams).

8.7 In addition to supporting the families in the bridging hotels, all local councils in Kent have committed to finding more long-term accommodation for Afghan families. So far there are 20 families accommodated across Kent and more are expected soon, subject to properties being found in the private sector or via charitable organisations. Across the wider South East as a whole there are 206 families that have resettled (this includes Kent's 20).

8.8 Resettlement support for Afghan families settled in their own homes is being provided in the same way as the support for the VPRS/UKRS. That is, the ten districts using the support organisations commissioned by KCC, will continue to do so, whilst Ashford and Canterbury will provide the support themselves.

8.9 In both the bridging hotels and the more long-term resettlement in Kent, there is strong partnership working between the district housing authorities, various functions within KCC (including the Resettlement Team, Education, Children's Services, Adult Social Care, Adult Education, Public Health), Health (CCG), Kent Fire and Rescue, Police, a strong voluntary sector (including various refugee support organisations across Kent) and religious groups.

8.10 The above programmes to support Afghans are distinct from the arrival of asylum seekers in Kent, some of whom are Afghans. With the exception of those staying at Napier Barracks near Hythe, most adults and families are transferred out of Kent under the national dispersal programme, while the position regarding unaccompanied under 18s (UASC) is reported above. See below for further details.

9. Funding to local authorities for VPRS, UKRS and Afghan schemes

9.1 For the VPRS and UKRS schemes local authorities that agree to resettle a family are provide with funding for 5 years to support resettlement and integration. This includes a proportion for Education and English language learning. CCGs are provided with additional funding for healthcare.

9.2 Although initially the funding for those supported under the Afghan schemes was a lower amount, the funding has now been brought in line with that for the VPRS and UKRS. The only difference is that it is paid over three rather than five years.

10. Community Sponsorship of VPRS, UKRS and ACRS

10.1 In addition to families resettled and supported by local authorities, charities and community groups are able to support families under the Community Sponsorship Scheme. In order to qualify the group must undergo a lengthy approval process (including by KCC and the district housing authority) and raise a certain amount of funding.

10.2 To date there are four successful Community Sponsorship groups in Kent and a couple of others being developed. KCC works closely with these groups and assists where possible, for example in helping to secure school places.

11. Adult and family group asylum seekers under the Adult Dispersal Scheme

11.1 Adult individuals and families who claim asylum once they have reached the United Kingdom (including those who have crossed the channel in small boats) are not allowed to claim benefits and public funds and are therefore supported by the Home Office if they require assistance with accommodation and daily living expenses. In the South East the accommodation and support is provided by Clearsprings Ready Homes, under contract to the Home Office.

11.2 The overwhelming majority of supported asylum seekers (just under 85,000 in total) are accommodated outside of Kent via the Adult Dispersal Scheme. Only around 1,000 of these are supported in the South East, including those accommodated at Napier Barracks (maximum numbers there at any one time being 304). Outside of Napier there are only 44 individuals supported in Kent (as at end December 2021). A 10 year plan to create greater equity across the UK is being slowly implemented by Government, taking into account the contribution of regions to other asylum and refugee schemes.

11.3 A very recent development is that part of the former Ministry of Defence site at Manston is being used as an initial assessment centre for adult asylum seekers and families following arrival to Kent by small boats. The maximum stay is expected to be 5 days with move-on taking place generally before then, to either contingency accommodation or dispersed accommodation. The site is expected to be fully functional by the end of March.

12. Hong Kong British National Overseas Visa Scheme

12.1 Since 31 January 2021 the Hong Kong BNO visa scheme has allowed eligible individuals from Hong Kong to settle in the UK with their family members. To qualify individuals needed to have registered their Hong Kong BNO status before 1 July 1997 (the date of handover to China). They also need to demonstrate that they have enough money to support themselves and their family members for at least 6 months and further, pay the healthcare surcharge.

12.2 Eligible family members include:

- spouse or partner
- child or grandchild under 18
- parent, grandparent, brother, sister, adult children if they live with the applicant and are very dependent on them for their care.

12.3 A recently announced change to the rules is expected to come into force in October this year. The Government has made the decision to enable individuals aged 18 or over who were born on or after 1 July 1997 and who have at least one BNO parent to apply to the route independently of their parent. This cohort will still be required to meet all of the other suitability and eligibility requirements for the route. This may lead to an influx of younger people after October.

12.4 By the end of 2021 103,900 visa applications had been made under the BNO route. The Government are unable to provide official data on where individuals have settled but based on surveys and intelligence from various partners, it is estimated that approximately 650 families have settled in Kent so far.

12.5 The BNO visa grants the right to work and study but not normally to apply for benefits or public funds (including local authority housing and homelessness assistance). Local authorities are able to claim destitution funding if support needs to be given and, in exceptional circumstances an application to lift the “No Recourse to Public Funds” condition can be made. KCC is administering the claims for destitution in Kent for this cohort but, to date, none have been received.

12.6 A certain amount of upfront funding has been made available to local authorities for support activities. In Kent this is being administered by KCC and following discussion with partners, will be used to fund support for integration activities across Kent, mental health support and additional capacity within the voluntary sector (on top of VCSE funding). Separate funding has been made available for English language (ESOL) support. KCC is managing the claims for this funding and to date 43 requests for this have been received.

13. Support for Ukrainian Refugees

13.1 At the time of writing this report, two mechanisms allowing Ukrainian refugees to enter the UK have been announced. These are a scheme allowing family members to join UK residents in the UK and a wider sponsorship scheme for those who do not have family members in the UK.

13.2 The Ukraine Family Scheme allows applicants to join family members or extend their stay in the UK as family members. The scheme is now opened to extended family, is free to apply to and will grant a visa for three years. A person applying via this route will be able to live, work and study in the UK and access benefits and other public funds.

13.3 From Tuesday 15 March, if an applicant is outside the UK and holds a valid Ukrainian international passport, they will no longer need to provide their biometric information from overseas to apply to the scheme. They will still need to complete an application online but will not need to attend an in-person appointment at a visa application center.

13.4 Further details of the new sponsorship scheme (for those without family ties) will be provided to Members at the committee hearing. It is understood that the scheme will allow sponsors, such as communities, private sponsors, or local authorities, to bring those forced to flee Ukraine to the UK, with no limit on numbers. People offering homes to refugees will receive a payment of £350 per month and it has been reported that local authorities will also be given funding (the amounts to be confirmed). Those who come under this scheme will be granted leave for an initial period of 12 months and be able to work and access benefits and public services.

Recommendations

Members of the Scrutiny Committee are asked to **NOTE** the number of UASC Kent County Council has accommodated since 10th September 2021 and the significant contribution this has made in reducing the number of UASC in hotels used by the Home Office since Summer 2021. Without the protocol between Kent County Council, Home Office and Department for Education, supported by a mandated National Transfer Scheme, this demand will have a significant impact upon Kent County Council's ability to meet its corporate parenting responsibilities for both UASC and citizen children placed with them. Members are also asked to note the refugee resettlement that is taking place within Kent under official government schemes

3. Contact details

Lead Officer

Louise Fisher
Assistant Director Front Door and Reception and
Safe Care Service
03000 414 791
Louise.Fisher@Kent.gov.uk

Lead Director

Sarah Hammond
Director of Integrated Children's Services
(Social Work Lead)
03000 411 488
Sarah.Hammond@kent.gov.uk

Lead Officer

Chris Grosskopf
Refugee Resettlement Programme Manager
03000 416181
Chris.grosskopf@kent.gov.uk

By: Anna Taylor, Scrutiny Research Officer

To: Scrutiny Committee, 23 March 2022

Subject: Work Programme

Summary: This report gives details of the proposed work programme for the Scrutiny Committee.

1. Introduction

- a) Any Member of the Council is entitled to give notice that they wish an item relevant to the functions of the Committee (which is not an excluded matter) to be included on the agenda for the next available meeting.
- b) The definition of an excluded matter referenced above is:
 - a. Any matter relating to a planning or licensing decision,
 - b. Any matter relating to a person in respect of which that person has a right of recourse to a review of right of appeal conferred by or under any enactment,
 - c. Any matter which is vexatious, discriminatory or not reasonable to be included in the agenda or discussion at a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.
- c) The Scrutiny Committee has the ability to 'call-in' decisions made by the Cabinet or individual Cabinet Members. Any two Members from more than one Political Group may give notice within five clear working days from the publication of a decision taken of their wish to call-in the decision.

2. Recommendation

The Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider and note the report.

Background Documents

None

Contact Details

Anna Taylor
Scrutiny Research Officer
anna.taylor@kent.gov.uk
03000 416478

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Work Programme - Scrutiny Committee March 2022

1. Items identified for upcoming meetings

Capital and Revenue Budget monitoring – update to Scrutiny Committee. (timing TBC)

8 June 2022	
Item	Item background
Crime and Disorder Meeting	Statutory requirement for the Scrutiny Committee to meet annually as the Crime and Disorder Committee. The Committee should review and scrutinise work undertaken by relevant partner agencies and authorities responsible for managing crime and disorder in the County.
SEND Transport	Update

SFI – S106 agreements – currently in progress.

20 July 2022	
Item	Item background

2. Items raised for consideration

Property Maintenance - Following on from, and depending on, discussions had at Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee

Mr Rayner request (The input of planning officers into local plans, including the scrutiny of their decisions by Members) – Scrutiny October 2021. Under discussion to determine the most appropriate route for consideration of this issue.

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