

From: Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education
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To: Cabinet – 24 June 2019

Subject: **ASYLUM UPDATE**

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report provides an update on the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Asylum Care Leavers in Kent, the funding provided by the Home Office, the National Transfer Scheme and work being undertaken to integrate these young people into their local communities through funding from the Controlling Migration Fund

1. Data Update

As at 31st May 2019 there were 267 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) and a further 895 UASC care leavers for whom KCC is responsible. The Home Office allocated quota of 0.07% for Kent is 233 UASC at any one time.

The total number of UASC referrals in Kent have dropped significantly since the height of 2015 when there were 948 new arrivals to 2018 when there were 172. However, it is of note that there have already been 87 referrals between January and May 2019 compared to just 45 during the same period last year.

This is likely to be due to a variety of reasons: the increase in organised criminal gangs operating in France and the relatively mild winter resulting in a large number of small boats crossing the Channel to Kent, containing primarily Iraqi family groups and individual adults but some UASC too;

2. Asylum Funding

In 2017-18 there was a total net shortfall in Home Office income of £3.6m and the main pressure areas were as follows:

- Shortfall in funding of the Millbank Reception Centre
- Shortfall in funding to support 16 and 17 year olds who had been placed in Independent Fostering Placements and had chosen to remain there
- Shortfall in funding to support 18+ care leavers

The shortfall in Home Office funding reduced to a further £2.5m in 2018-19 due to the following changes:

- A one-off payment received in year to cover Millbank Reception Centre costs not met through the grant.
- Reduction in costs of supporting under 16s as the 2015 cohort of children aged out.
- Reduction in the shortfall in funding for 16- and 17-year olds due to lower number of children supported, remaining in Kent for the whole of financial year and more capacity to support new arrivals in more cost-effective accommodation
- However, an increase in the shortfall in care leaver funding grew due to the majority of the 2015 arrivals now becoming 18+, and an extension of the statutory duties to support care leavers up to the age of 25 without enough Additional Burdens monies being made available to support this level of activity.

The total shortfall in funding across 2017/18 and 2018/19 is £6.1m and KCC continues to pursue the Home Office for further funding to address this.

However, following the recent conclusion of the UASC funding review, as part of which Kent has played a significant part, the rate paid for supporting 16- and 17-year olds has been increased to equal the rate paid for the under 16's. This is a very welcome change and will assist in meeting the costs incurred for those young people who remain in foster care beyond their 16th birthday, particularly those in the IFA market during 2019/20.

There is currently no outcome to the Home Office funding review for Care Leavers regarding grant levels paid, but the DfE have acknowledged the need for additional funding to cover the extended duties up to 25. The total grant received for this will double in 2019-20 which will help to support the asylum care leavers.

Unfortunately, the Home Office has confirmed that the additional funding payment for Millbank which was made in 2018-19 will not continue. This is due to the increase daily rate for all 16- and 17-year olds which they anticipate should cover the additional front-loaded costs of young people being placed in Millbank when they arrive.

If Millbank can operate at an optimal level of occupancy and if the young people remain in Kent for the whole of a financial year then this conclusion is accurate. However, a deficit in Millbank running costs starts to open again as soon as the numbers of young people drop below a certain level and/or if young people remain in Millbank for several weeks before being transferred to other Local Authorities.

Although the costs of supporting our UASC Care Leavers will result in a £1.4m overspend for 2019/20, the overall gap following the spending review has been significantly reduced to £0.6m and is below £1m for the first time since the 2010 Home Office spending review settlement.

We continue to lobby the Home Office to speed up the decision-making process for all UASC, but for Care Leavers in particular, in order that universal welfare benefits can be accessed when there is an entitlement for individuals to do so.

3. Update of the National Transfer Scheme (NTS)

The NTS seeks to achieve the safe transfer of UASC away from local authorities that are looking after more than 0.07% of UASC to their total child population. Kent currently has

267 UASC and the 0.07% figure is 233. Kent has not taken part in the scheme since April 2018 because significant numbers of other local authorities were refusing to take young people resulting in them staying in Millbank for many months.

There continues to be a significant delay in transferring young people through the scheme due to the fact that it is voluntary so a number of local authorities throughout England have not taken part at all, as well as concerns around funding, placements and outstanding age assessments if the young person's age is disputed, all of which make other local authorities reluctant to accept UASC.

A small number of young people have also been brought into Kent through schemes such as DUBS III and the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme, but these are planned moves and sometimes as part of a family group.

A bid was submitted at the end of May 2019 by SESPM (South East Strategic Partnership for Migration) to the European Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund to fund 4 UASC reception centres across the whole of the south east to ensure a consistent offer across the region. These would include Millbank alongside facilities in Hampshire, Portsmouth and Oxford and would act as assessment centres, in the anticipation that this would encourage other Local Authorities to take young people already assessed.

Kent has actively supported the bid and provided much of the data which had previously been used in the business case that was successfully presented to the Home Office around additional funding for Millbank. The arrangement would be centred on strong partnership working and would aim to establish greater collaboration across the region whilst building on existing expertise in the region and should sit alongside the NTS.

4. The Controlling Migration Fund (CMF)

Kent has been very successful in its bid for funding from the Controlling Migration Fund for 2018-19 and 2019-20. The purpose of the fund is to help build community cohesion and encourage integration for UASC and asylum care leavers. As a result, several bespoke posts are now being funded directly from the fund; these include:

- An Emotional Health & Wellbeing Practitioner – reduces issues of potential isolation, radicalisation and disengagement with the local community and screens new UASC arrivals regarding their mental health and wellbeing
- Countywide Benefits Coordinator – provides expertise to support the process, advance claims and track cases
- Countywide Offending Coordinator – supports young people on remand/in custody to oversee effective discharge and support risk of offending
- 4 x Community Engagement Workers – develop increased peer support and community engagement with young people, provide support with integration in communities and when the young people move from Millbank to their own accommodation

The Community Engagement Workers have been working closely with young people who were previously in Millbank and are now in the community to set up UASC Peer Champions, who provide peer support and mentoring to other young people moving into their area in order to promote community engagement and integration and help them to understand

culture and behaviour. They attend regular training sessions and events to develop their skills and awareness.

UASC Peer Champions are leading on a project to deliver an exhibition of paintings and drawings by UASC and asylum care leavers in order to raise awareness and promote self-expression. The exhibition is being launched on 18th June during Refugee Week and will then be displayed at libraries across Kent.

CMF funding is also being used to establish an under-18 football team for UASC and other children in care which will be managed by volunteers and registered with a Kent FA league for the 2019/20 season. This will help young people to integrate into the local community through the universal language of sport and team games. Initially the club will be all male but there are plans to develop a girls or mixed team in the future.

5. UASC and Care Leavers Working Group

In order to conclude the review of Care Leaver funding, the Home Office has established an operational working group of which Kent is an active member. The working group is focussing on the challenges being faced by local authorities when supporting former UASC care leavers, especially around funding and is exploring various models including some deployed in Europe. It also provides an opportunity for the Home Office to share information and update the group on any forthcoming changes to process that are being considered or are in the pipeline.

A new operating model is being designed by the Home Office to make the asylum process quicker, easier and less adversarial for young people and they are hoping to get this signed off by this autumn. The Home Office has also agreed to review an extension of the 3 months' funding window to conduct Human Rights Assessments to 9 months at the request of the members of the group.

As a result of a language barrier, many young people incur benefit sanctions and the group were impressed to hear that Kent has agreed a policy with the DWP not to impose sanctions on any of our former UASC without notifying the Personal Adviser first. Other local authorities will look to follow this good practice.

Conclusion

Every effort continues to be made to pursue the Home Office to address the deficits in funding in 2017-18 and 2018-19 which has left Kent with a £6.1m deficit for these two years alone. Currently matters relating to the funding for Care Leavers remain outstanding along with a firm commitment on the part of UKVI to progress the immigration applications of this group as a priority. We are awaiting the outcome of our bid for the use of Millbank as a Regional reception and assessment centre, and future plans from the Home Office to ensure that the NTS works in a more equitable and fair way across the whole Country.

However, for Kent it is promising to note that the forecast for 2019-20 has improved since the announcement of the funding review for the under 18's. It is also encouraging to note the work being done around community cohesion as part of the Controlling Migration Fund grant which has provided c £500K over the past two years to provide additional support for our UASC children in care and care leavers.

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