

Local Government Association briefing

Supporting refugee and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

December 2016



Key messages

- The LGA, partner organisations regionally and nationally, and many councils have been working hard to scale up the arrangements that have supported new arrivals from the Calais refugee camp. In order to do this, local government needs full recovery of costs for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and better, transparent real time information.
- The challenges faced by councils will not just be financial, but also relate to the ongoing availability of foster care placements, school places, therapeutic services, places to learn English, legal advice, and translation services. We need a conversation across government and with other partners to enable and maintain access to these.
- Councils continue to work hard to support the many programmes for refugees and asylum seekers currently in operation. In addition to the growing number of unaccompanied children seeking asylum in the UK, councils also help families through the Syrian programme, other refugee resettlement schemes, and large numbers of children in destitute families whose asylum applications have been refused by the Home Office. We need greater alignment of these programmes so any ongoing needs can be met without creating unsustainable pressure on local services.

Background information

Councils in England currently look after 69,500 children who are unable to live with their birth parents, a figure that has increased by just under 2,500 over the past three years.ⁱ

Councils have an excellent track record of welcoming unaccompanied children. Over 3,000 lone children claimed asylum in the UK during the year ending September 2016ⁱⁱ and councils were providing care and support for more than 4,000 unaccompanied asylum seeking children at 31 March 2016.ⁱⁱⁱ As well as local government working hard to ensure care packages are in place for all the children in their care born in the UK, we need to ensure that systems can meet the needs of all children regardless of their route to the UK.

The various programmes include:

- **Dublin III Regulation children:** Children can arrive to be reunited with family members already in the UK via the Dublin III Regulation route. The first children and young people transferred from the Calais camp have arrived via this route. These children and young people are temporarily placed in reception centres or fostering placements whilst councils assess whether the family arrangements are suitable.
- **'Dubs amendment' children:** In May 2016 the Government announced as part of an amendment to the Immigration Act 2016 that it will be resettling

Briefing

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unaccompanied children from other European countries into the UK – France, Italy and Greece – with the number of children brought under this scheme to be agreed in partnership with local government and following liaison with the countries the children are currently living in. Unaccompanied asylum seeking children are placed into the care of councils through the Home Office-run National Transfer Scheme.

- **Spontaneous or clandestine arrivals:** under previous regulations, unaccompanied children claiming asylum after illegal entry to the UK were the responsibility of the council where they first presented as a child in need of care. As numbers increased, this has caused capacity issues for those areas which are ports of entry to the UK. The National Transfer Scheme is designed to achieve a more equitable distribution to address these.
- **Syrian resettlement scheme and the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme:** There are a growing number of children in families supported by the Syrian programme and other refugee resettlement schemes, including the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme. Councils receive funding for five years as a contribution to the costs for families resettling in the UK.
- **Failed asylum applications:** Councils support large numbers of children in destitute families whose asylum applications have been refused by the Home Office. There is no government funding provided for this.

The current position: supporting children from Calais

The pace of arrivals had slowed in recent weeks while the Home Office assessed children in safe locations in France for their eligibility to come to the UK. The situation remains very fluid but there were large numbers of children arriving last week, with final numbers still to be announced.

As above, children will come via the 'Dubs Amendment' to be supported by councils via the National Transfer Scheme if they are unaccompanied, or be reunited with family under the Dublin Treaty following viability assessments from councils. Those arriving under the Dubs Amendment are expected to include girls and younger children who will require foster care.

UK social workers have assessed the children prior to arrival and councils should receive at least 48 hours' notice of arrivals. Councils have been asked to notify their Regional Strategic Migration Partnership if they are able to offer any placements. As with children claiming asylum on arrival, children will have to apply to stay in the UK. The Department of Education have clarified the sort of accommodation that can be used and the statutory responsibilities of councils at all points of the resettlement process. This and other information is available on the LGA website at www.local.gov.uk/refugees.

Sustainable and sufficient funding

Councils require long-term funding arrangements from the Government so that they can fulfil the commitment to support children starting a new life in the UK, both under the direct care of councils and within new families. Enhanced funding rates are now available for local councils, representing an increase of between 20 to 33 per cent on previous daily rates for unaccompanied children.^{iv} However, councils consistently tell us this is not enough.

Using data provided by dozens of responding local authorities, a recent report from the Association of Directors of Children Services (ADCS) indicated that the grant funding provided by the Home Office covers on average just 50 per cent of

the costs of caring for a UASC.^v Councils may be claiming up to the limit of the grant funding available, rather than claiming for all the costs incurred.

Local government is already facing significant financial pressures and demand for children's social care services has been increasingly rapidly in recent years, with a 60 per cent rise in children on child protection plans since 2008. Councils must not be forced to choose between funding support for unaccompanied children or their existing population of children in need of care.

Children will also need school places, therapeutic services, places to learn English, legal advice, and translation services, and councils and their partners are raising concerns around access to these. We need a conversation across government around enabling and maintaining access to these vital services. Unaccompanied children in the UK enter the care of a local authority and should have the same rights as a child who enters the care system for any other reason.

Many councils report that much of the remaining placement capacity is in the independent foster care sector, which can cost significantly more than the funding rates provided by the Home Office. With the majority of UASC placed in foster care, the national shortage of foster care placements was cited in the ADCS report as the main challenge for most authorities. In 2016, the Fostering Network estimated a shortfall of 9,000 foster carers to fully meet the needs of looked-after children already in local authority care.^{vi}

Regional Strategic Migration Partnerships play a key role in responding to crises in asylum or resettlement, in joining up Home Office programmes, and sharing good practice. This has been recognised in the range of funding streams available to them to assist this work. However, a more joined up and sustainable approach to their funding in the longer-term is needed to support their work.

Managing risks

Better and more transparent real time information, particularly around support for children from Calais is needed, so local councils can ensure there is sufficient capacity for new arrivals and plan effectively in the long-term.

We also need to work together to minimise the possible risks of absconding, particularly given the uncertain future status of asylum seeking children, and related concerns such as risk of child sexual exploitation and trafficking. We wish to work with the Department for Education on the safeguarding strategy and review of funding in the spring.^{vii}

ⁱ [Children looked after in England including adoptions](#), DFE, September 2016

ⁱⁱ National Statistics – [asylum](#), 1 December 2016:

ⁱⁱⁱ [Children looked after in England including adoptions](#), DFE, September 2016

^{iv} The current rates and other sources of funding available are listed on www.local.gov.uk/refugees.

^v Special thematic [report](#) on unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children, ADCS, October 2016

^{vi} Fostering Network [media release](#), January 2016

^{vii} [Safeguarding strategy for unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children](#), November 2016