

Title of the Report

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) cared for by Walsall Council

Executive Summary:

This report updates the CPB on our responsibilities to and the current needs of children in our care and who have been in our care who arrived in this country as a child unaccompanied and who are seeking asylum. The report updates the board of the services provided to these children and young people by Walsall children's services and developments being made in improving that service delivery.

Reason for bringing to the Corporate Parenting Board:

Updating Report requested by Corporate Parenting Board

Recommendations:

That:

Corporate Parent Board note the work undertaken with and developments identified for this group of vulnerable children and young people.

Background papers:

None

Corporate Parenting Pledges

The Walsall Promise for all Children in Care and Care Leavers

Resource and legal considerations:

Local authority duties to young people and care leavers are set out in legislation:

- Children Act 1989
- Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Children and Social Work Act 2017.

The local authority are able to claim monies back from central government to support UAS children and those young people who's immigration status is unresolved who

used to be in our care.

Council Corporate Plan Priorities:

- Children have the best possible start and are safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well.
- People have increased independence, improved health and can positively contribute to their communities.

Citizen impact:

We seek to provide a service which meets our statutory responsibilities to this specific vulnerable group and redresses the disadvantages that they experience.

Environmental impact:

None

Performance management:

Corporate Parenting Board ensures everyone works together to fulfil the corporate parenting role and to hold each other to account for making this happen.

- it acts as the visible organisational champion for looked after children and young people and care leavers, promoting their rights, entitlements and aspirations;
- the mobilisation and optimum use of resources available to get the best chance of success for children in care and to support care leavers to positively move on to live independently.

Reducing inequalities:

The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-2025 sets out the response to secure improvements in the equality of services, which, when achieved will have a positive impact on our most vulnerable children, young people and families. By being effective Corporate Parents for Children in Care and Care Leavers, we collectively seek to redress the disadvantage that looked after children and care leavers face. Those children and young people that are physically separated from their communities, families and cultures and whose first language is not English have additional disadvantages which we seek to redress.

Consultation:

In our continued development of our service to UAS children and those care experienced who were UAS children we have consulted with and will continue to work with our colleagues in education, health, accommodation providers and Impact for Change

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1.0	Report
1.1	<p>Unaccompanied asylum seeking children who arrive in the UK become children in care under section 20 of the Children Act, and the local authority has the same duties and responsibilities to them as to any child in our care until they reach 18 and beyond that into Leaving Care whilst their “right to remain” is established. If they achieve right to remain status, they continue to be entitled to Leaving Care services in addition to universal benefits such as universal credit, right to work and right to rent a property. Until their right to remain is resolved, the local authority provides them with an allowance and appropriate accommodation. A contribution for these costs is met through the Home Office.</p> <p>Children who have fled and claim asylum have in addition to the feelings and stress of not growing up or living with their family, often additional needs for us to consider: language and culture; often extreme and traumatic life experiences, fear and uncertainty about the outcome of their immigration proceedings. Often extremely resilient, they are vulnerable to CE and modern slavery through unclear or not available pathways into work or education.</p>
1.2	<p>Unaccompanied asylum seeking children who arrive in the UK become children in care under section 20 of the Children Act, and the local authority has the same duties and responsibilities to them as to any child in our care until they reach 18 and beyond that into Leaving Care whilst their “right to remain” is established. If they achieve right to remain status, they continue to be entitled to Leaving Care services in addition to universal benefits such as universal credit, right to work and right to rent a property. Until their right to remain is resolved, the local authority provides them with an allowance and appropriate accommodation. A contribution for these costs is met through the Home Office.</p>
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2.0	<p>Routes into Walsall’s Care</p> <p>Some children who are unaccompanied asylum seekers present themselves or are found in Walsall and therefore become Walsall’s responsibility. Of the 4 new children Walsall have looked after in the last 6 months, 1 has come into our care in this way. The majority come into our care through the National Transfer Scheme</p>
2.1	<p>National Transfer Scheme (NTS).</p> <p>The NTS became temporarily mandatory for all local authorities from November 2021.</p> <p>The scheme’s intention is to share the responsibility of care for unaccompanied asylum seeking children across all local authorities in order to be able to provide them with the care that they need and end the use of hotel accommodation for children. The scheme was voluntary for local authorities until November 2021 and Walsall participated as apart of the West</p>

	<p>Midlands group. The scheme works by taking tranches of 652 children at a time to transfer across the country. Walsall are responsible for accepting 4 in each tranche. The tranche is broken down into cycles. We are currently in cycles 12, 13, 14 and 15, tranche 4 (the cycles are being run simultaneously because of the high demand currently). On average this has meant that in recent months Walsall has started to care for one child each month (5 since April 2022) . Channel crossings have increased in frequency over the past few weeks which has meant a higher proportion of UASC coming through to the NTS, and the scheme has adapted to meet this demand through acceleration of the cycles. As a result we estimate this pressure will significantly increase over coming months. As we generally look after older children, this continuous flow will continue to impact on our Care Leaver population, which will expand.</p> <p>In determining where children are moved to within the scheme the Home Office uses a formula taking into account the existing child population and the number of supported asylum seekers, pressures on children's services and the best interests of the child. Prior to 24th August 2022, a local authority which was supporting 0.07% of its child population as asylum seekers did not need to support any further UAS children under the scheme. On August 24th 2022, to cope with high levels of demand, the Home Office made alterations to the National Transfer Scheme. The most significant changes are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The threshold of 0.07% of UASC as a percentage child population was raised to 0.1%. This means that Walsall will meet this threshold when it exceeds looking after 69 children who are UAS. • The time frame for transfer of a child to a local authority's care when requested has been reduced from 10 working days to 5 working days. This is a significant challenge in relation to identifying both a social worker and somewhere safe for the child to live within stretched resources. <p>Our estimate, based on the current demand is that for the next few months the numbers of children we will be required to look after through the scheme, will double, which will impact our resources overall.</p>	
2.2	<p>The Home Office provides the local authority supporting a child under the scheme with £143 per child per night.</p> <p>The Home Office provides the local authority £270 per week to assist in the support of former UASC care leavers.</p> <p>Following the changes made on 24th August, the Home Office has made additional funding available for all children who are moved from a hotel within the 5 day transfer window.</p>	
2.3	<p>The latest data available shows Walsall has 69,375 children aged 0-17 and 16 UAS children. Therefore the proportion of our children who are UAS children is currently 0.02%.</p>	
3.0	Walsall's current UASC and Former UASC population	
3.1	<p>Walsall currently cares for 16 UAS children and 37 Care Leavers who were UASC. All but one is male.</p>	
3.2	Age	Numbers of Children and Young People
	13	1

	14	0	
	15	1	
	16	3	
	17	11	
	18	5	
	19	14	
	20	8	
	21	4	
	22	5	
	23	1	
3.3	Nationality		
	Nationality	Under 18	18 and over
	Afghani	2	9
	Albanian	1	3
	Eritrean	2	5
	Iranian	4	4
	Iraqi	3	8
	Pakistani	0	1
	Sudanese	2	3
	Syrian	1	4
	Egyptian	1	0
4.0	Care Needs		
4.1	Accommodation		
	<p>Of children under 18 who are in our care as UASC, 4 live in a foster home whilst 12 live in supported semi-independent accommodation most living within Birmingham and across the West Midlands in shared properties. Due to unresolved immigration status, most young people who are asylum seekers at 18 do not have the right to hold a tenancy until their legal status is resolved, and therefore we continue to support them in this accommodation until their status is resolved and until we have been able to support them to find accommodation which meets their needs.</p> <p>Currently 32% (12) of our care experienced former UASC live independently, 60% (22) are living in supported semi-independent accommodation, whilst 8% (3) live in family settings.</p>		
4.2	Health		
	<p>Each child who begins to be cared for by Walsall Council has an initial health assessment and plan and the health needs of children who are UAS are met in the same way. These assessments should be carried out within a statutory time frame of 20 days after being in care. All UAS children, as children in our care, receive dental and optical care and their emotional wellbeing measured annually through a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire.</p> <p>Due to the lack of information we often have about a UAS child's health needs at the time of the initial health assessment and plan early time, often little is known and we have to rely on the child to self-report and health issues. Annual review health assessments undertaken a year after coming into our care are able to give us a much more holistic view on physical and</p>		

	<p>emotional health. CAMHS and FLASH consultation are open to any child who has emotional or mental health needs as a result of their history or journey here, which is most often traumatic.</p> <p>JA is 17, and came into our care at aged 13. He has additional emotional needs due to trauma from his history and journey here and distress at having no idea where any of his family are. In addition to supporting him to try and find his family through the Red Cross, he has received a FLASH service in the past. Currently his emotional needs are met through a stable warm and nurturing foster home and stable education.</p>
4.3	<p>Education and Employment</p> <p>Children who come into our care before year 12, attend school and can access the full curriculum. Children who come into our care post 16 however currently have less options available. All have opportunity to learn an accredited English course, ESOL, however we have struggled to identify additional Further Education courses for children who come into our care post 16. From September the Virtual school has developed additional capacity to support with post 16 education and we have started to work with colleagues from the Virtual School to identify how we can improve this offer for UAS children.</p> <p>UAS children or former UAS children are unable to be employed until their immigration status.</p> <p>As a result, UAS and former UAS children are disproportionately represented in our not in employment or training data, and more importantly experience uncertainty and limbo which increases their vulnerability to working illegally and being exploited.</p> <p>Due to immigration status UAS children and asylum seekers do not meet the criteria for Impact For Change to support them. One of our challenges is to offer young people work experience. We have recently met with Impact for Change, who have offered to provide informal advice on a drop-in basis, which we plan to trial in September.</p>
4.4	<p>Legal status</p> <p>Of the 37 young people aged 18 and above their legal status is as follows.</p> <p>20 have been granted Limited Leave to Remain</p> <p>15 have their applications in process</p> <p>1 has been granted the right to rent and work.</p> <p>1 is Appeal Rights Exhausted and is now supported directly by the Home Office.</p> <p>The progress of applications for asylum claims remains slow, although we have enabled video interviews to be held to prevent delay.</p>
5.0	<p>Participation</p> <p>All Care Plans, Pathway plans and other significant documents for young people are now translated into the young person's first written language. (for some children this will be English).</p> <p>Interpreters are made available whenever needed for direct work with children and young people.</p>

5.1	<p>We have recognised that our current methods of involving children in our care and young people have not enabled us to involve UASC children and former UASC sufficiently in participation work. There are challenges in that the group is not a homogenous group and they do not as a whole group live near to each other. An online participation survey of all UASC had only 4 responses, only one of whom was interested in taking part in a group. Following consultation with other local authorities in the West Midlands we are currently exploring buddying up with Telford and Wrekin who do an out of borough, Birmingham based, engagement event for their UASC bi-monthly. We hope to learn from Telford about how they engage this group of young people as well as sharing events in the future with them to learn from the young people. We are meeting with Telford and Wrekin in September to progress this further.</p>
6.0	<p>Each child or young person who has come to be cared for by Walsall as an unaccompanied minor has their own unique experience. A is just one example of the positive difference Walsall has made.</p>
6.1	<p>A is just coming up to his 19th Birthday. He became known to children's services following being arrested on a cannabis farm, further investigations led to confirmation that A had been trafficked and used as a slave by criminals. A's presentation was described as being extremely fearful, and vulnerable with high anxieties, he was placed in a foster home. When he turned 18, he moved to live in supported accommodation; initially, he was very worried about the move as he was scared his traffickers would find him, which found him not wanting to leave the house at all. Both his pa and support worker from the project has been supporting him to build his confidence, teach him new skills and offer reassurance to him showing him that he is cared for and will be supported which has seen A making good progress. A is on the ESOL course at an Adults Skill Centre, where over the last year he has made friends and is very popular amongst his peers, he now has the confidence to travel on public transport and will go out into town to meet friends for a coffee. His English is improving and he works hard to learn. He aspires to be an electrician.</p> <p>His National Referral Mechanism referral as an adult has concluded positive, which has meant he has been allocated a modern slavery advocate from the Salvation Army and he will receive additional finance of £60 per week victim supplement and have access to bespoke trauma counselling. A is still waiting for his substantive interview to start his immigration process. A has experienced significant trauma, he continues to progress, shares his good sense of humour and embraces the support on offer to him.</p>
7.0	<p>Analysis/ Conclusion</p>
7.1	<p>Walsall currently looks after 15 children who arrived unaccompanied from overseas, which is 0.02% of it's child population. The majority of children come into Walsall's care through the National Transfer Scheme. Given the pressures upon local authorities such as Kent, this scheme is likely to remain mandatory for local authorities and therefore Walsall is likely to be required to care for new children at each cycle. At times of high demand the NTS</p>

	system flexes to require local authorities to care for more children, as is the case at this time. Our UASC population is therefore likely to grow and our responsibilities to former UASC will continue to grow.
7.2	Our population of children who have arrived unaccompanied is diverse, from many nationalities, religions and cultural backgrounds and therefore their needs will continue to need to be met on an individual basis within resources available. What these children and young people have in common is experience of trauma and uncertainty about their future.
7.3	Children and young people in our care who have arrived unaccompanied are disadvantaged and vulnerable through being in the care system and in addition experience additional disadvantages in relation to language, physical separation from family and communities, cultural differences, and their immigration status meaning they are not always able to participate fully in society.
7.4	Walsall is a participant member of regional forum which helps us stay informed and share good practice with our regional neighbours in order to develop our services to meet children's and young people's needs.
8.0	Service Development
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Childrens Social Care to continue to work closely with colleagues in Education, Health and Impact for Change to further improve our service and offer to those children and young people who are UAS. • Continue to build and develop relationships with other local authorities across the region and nationally to learn and develop our practice • Review of the Leaving Care Service to consider how we can meet the needs of former UAS consistently and develop expertise and service delivery through specialist PA's. • Continue to explore ways of engaging children and young people in participation events which meet their needs.