

Local Government Association briefing Backbench business debate on refugees and unaccompanied asylum seeking children

Thursday 23 February 2017



Key messages

- Councils, working with central government, national partners and regional bodies, have shown great leadership in building additional capacity for children from the Calais camp at fast pace. As well as direct support for children, local authorities freed up social workers to assess children before their arrival in the UK and to undertake family assessments, often with only a day or two days' notice.
- A recent report by the Association of Directors of Children's Services' found that the higher funding rates available from July 2016 cover on average just 50 per cent of the cost to councils of caring for unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC).¹ This funding only contributes to the cost of the actual placement and leaves little or no money for the local authority's statutory duties towards the child.
- The ongoing challenges facing local government include the availability of foster care placements, school places, therapeutic services, places to learn English, legal advice, and translation services. We need joined up communication across government and other partners to enable access to these services.
- Councils need better, transparent real time information to give a sense of the range of asylum seekers and refugees that local authorities are supporting. More information in advance on the needs of individual children will allow for effective matching with the placements available.
- Local government continues to work hard to support the many programmes for refugees and asylum seekers currently in operation. In addition to the growing number of UASC, councils also help families through the Syrian programme, other refugee resettlement schemes, and large numbers of destitute families whose asylum applications have been refused by the Home Office. We need greater alignment of these programmes in order to assess councils' and local communities' capacity to meet ongoing needs of vulnerable children and families without creating unsustainable pressure on local services.

Background information

Supporting unaccompanied children

Councils have an excellent track record in welcoming unaccompanied children. The National Transfer Scheme (NTS) was introduced to ensure each region takes a proportion of unaccompanied children in order to achieve a more equal distribution across the UK. Local authorities continue to work with existing

¹ ADCS Safeguarding Pressures Phase 5: Special Thematic Report on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children
http://adcs.org.uk/assets/documentation/ADCS_UASC_Report_Final_FOR_PUBLICATION.pdf

Regional Strategic Migration Partnerships (RSMPs) to confirm the total number of unaccompanied children that they can support.

DfE annual data shows that since 2015 there has been a 54 per cent rise in the total number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children in the care of English local authorities: up to 4,210 children at 31 March 2016 from 2,740 in 2015 and 1,950 in 2013.²

This also shows that 136 councils (89 per cent) were looking after unaccompanied asylum seeking children on 31 March 2016. We anticipate that figure will be higher following the closure of the Calais camp and the introduction of the NTS that figure will be higher.³

As such, children resettled under the Dubs amendment represent a small proportion of the growing number of unaccompanied children entering the care of local authorities. Questions around capacity to support further transfers under the Dubs amendment need to be looked at in this wider context.

Supporting refugee and asylum seeking children in families

The overwhelming majority of councils support refugees and asylum seekers as part of the multiple schemes in operation. 8,000 children were also resettled last year through all resettlement schemes.⁴ Some areas taking low or not taking unaccompanied children will have high numbers of Syrian refugee families or dispersed asylum seekers, and vice-versa.

- Local authorities are required to conduct an assessment of relatives' suitability to care for the children transferred to the UK under the Dublin Treaty.⁵ If family assessments are deemed unsatisfactory or subsequently break down, children are placed in the care of the local authority.
- Local authorities have also committed to supporting 20,000 Syrian refugees through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme and 3,000 families via the Vulnerable Children Resettlement Programme, with 4,400 refugees resettled so far.
- Over 200 authorities are involved in the dispersal of asylum seekers.⁶ Local authorities directly support those whose claims fail.
- 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.⁷ Unaccompanied children represent 6 per cent of the looked-after children population.⁸

² Children looked after in England (including adoption) year ending 31 March 2016:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/556331/SFR41_2016_Text.pdf

³ Children looked after in England (including adoption) year ending 31 March 2016:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/556331/SFR41_2016_Text.pdf

⁴ Immigration: Written statement – HCWS467

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2017-02-08/HCWS467/>

⁵ UK Visas and Immigration guidance, Asylum EU Dublin procedure

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/asylum-eu-dublin-procedure>

⁶ Home Affairs Select Committee report on Asylum Accommodation,

<https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmhaff/637/63702.htm>

⁷ [Children looked after in England including adoptions](#), DfE, September 2016

⁸ Children looked after in England (including adoption) year ending 31 March 2016:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/556331/SFR41_2016_Text.pdf

It is important that all schemes are co-ordinated and funded sustainably to ensure councils can offer proper support and continue to provide services for their local community.

More information on the schemes can be found at on the LGA website at www.local.gov.uk/refugees

Funding shortfall

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.

The Government increased funding to £41,610 per annum for under-16s and £33,215 for those aged 16 and 17.⁹ We welcomed the enhanced rates for and want to work with the Government on the review of funding in the next financial year to assess whether these rates are right. Local authorities also can bid to use the £100 million Controlling Migration Fund (CMF) to support initiatives for these children, such as foster care recruitment campaigns, training for social workers or specialist counselling following concerns around wider capacity to support children.

The funding for unaccompanied asylum seeking children still does not meet the full costs of caring for the children. The Association of Directors of Children's Services' report on unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children found that these higher funding rates available from July 2016 cover on average just 50 per cent of the cost to councils of caring for unaccompanied asylum seeking children, only contributing to the cost of the actual placement, leaving little or no money for the local authority's statutory duties towards the child.¹⁰

With local government facing a £1.9 billion funding gap for children's services by 2020, it is increasingly difficult for councils to voluntarily support additional UASC without sufficient funding to ensure that other services for vulnerable children are not affected. Councils must not be forced to choose between funding support for unaccompanied children or their existing population of children in need of care.

Foster placements

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 its report. 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.¹¹

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 IFA placements costing as much as double a comparable in house placement, the current rates are unlikely to cover this in many areas of the country.

Children will also need school places, therapeutic services, places to learn English, legal advice, and translation services, and councils and their partners are

⁹ Asylum: Children in Care: Written question – HL4519
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2017-01-10/HL4519/>

¹⁰ ADCS, Safeguarding Pressures Phase 5 – Special Thematic Report on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children
http://adcs.org.uk/assets/documentation/ADCS_UASC_Report_Final_FOR_PUBLICATION.pdf

¹¹ Fostering Network [media release](#), January 2016

raising concerns around access to these. We need a conversation across government around enabling and maintaining access to these vital services.

Implementing the Dubs Amendment

The Immigration Act 2016 requires the UK to bring a specified number of unaccompanied refugee children from Europe to the UK, and required the Government to consult with local authorities to set the figure.

The Immigration Minister wrote to all local council leaders with three formal requests regarding unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children, including the Dubs Amendment, on 8 September 2016. Responses were not shared with the Local Government Association and we were not asked to assist with this process. The Government has indicated that this was a one-off consultation. Responses from local authorities indicated that 400 children could be supported.¹²

The Government announced on 8 February that it will resettle 350 children under section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 (commonly known as the Dubs amendment), with 200 children already arrived. A further announcement on how other 150 children will be transferred to the UK is forthcoming but it is anticipated it will be similar to the eligibility set for children resettled from the Calais camp.¹³

More than 900 unaccompanied children came to the UK this year, both under the terms of the Dubs amendment and the family reunification provisions of the Dublin III Regulations. This includes more than 750 children from France as part of the Calais camp clearance, almost half the unaccompanied who were in the camp at the time of the clearance.¹⁴

¹² Immigration: Written statement – HCWS467

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2017-02-08/HCWS467/>

¹³ Implementation of section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 in France:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/568565/Implementation_of_section_67_of_the_Immigration_Act_2016_in_France_v2.0.pdf

¹⁴ Refugees: Children in Care: Written question – HL4346

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2016-12-21/HL4346/>