

ANGUS COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND LEARNING COMMITTEE - 1 JUNE 2023

UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM SEEKING CHILDREN

REPORT BY KATHRYN LINDSAY - DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND JUSTICE

ABSTRACT

This report gives an update about Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children in Angus, who are identified and transferred through the Home Office National Transfer Scheme. The National Transfer Scheme commenced in July 2021 as a voluntary 'opt-in' scheme. The aim being to achieve a more even distribution of eligible children and young people across the United Kingdom. In February 2022, the scheme was made mandatory by the UK Government and a dispersal rota was implemented. Since the rota was mandated, Angus have received 7 young people. Recent changes to the rota have increased the minimum requirement of each local authority from 0.07% to 0.1% of the total child population. It is anticipated that there will be a significant increase in the number of children allocated to Angus over the coming year. Retrospective financial support for care, education/training and social support needs is provided per child received into local authority care.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Children and Learning Committee:

- (i) Note the progress and future challenges in respect of receiving, supporting, and integrating unaccompanied asylum-seeking children into Angus communities
- (ii) Note that all corporate parenting responsibilities extend to this group of children and young people
- (iii) Require the Director of Children, Families and Justice to report to the Committee any emerging significant resource issues impacting upon the ability of the local authority to meet the obligations arising under the National Transfer Scheme.

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE COUNCIL PLAN

2.1 This report contributes to the following local outcomes:

The Council Plan 2023-2028:

- Reduce inequalities in all our communities
- Provide the best start in life for children
- Create more opportunities for people to live well and achieve their personal goals
- Improve physical, mental health and wellbeing

2.2 It aligns to the following Children's Services Plans/Strategies:

- [Tayside Plan for Children, Young People and Families](#) 2021 - 2023

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Reference is made to [Report 303/21](#) and [Schedule 3 of C&L Committee 11th January 2022](#).

3.2 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) arrive in the United Kingdom often following a long and dangerous journey where they may have been at risk of distinct types of abuse and

exploitation, which can often leave them traumatised. An UASC is a person below the age of 18 who arrives in the UK seeking Asylum and who has no adult with responsibility for their care.

- 3.3 To provide a formal mechanism for an equitable distribution of UASC arrivals, the Home Office (who retain authority in relation to Asylum and Immigration matters) implemented the [National Transfer Scheme \(NTS\)](#). From 26 July 2021, the NTS operated on a voluntary basis across local authorities in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The scheme allowed those authorities with UASC at or over 0.07% of their child population, could refer newly arrived unaccompanied children for transfer to another area.
- 3.4 Following continued challenges in achieving the aims of equitable distribution of children and young people across the United Kingdom, in December 2021, all local authorities with children's services across the UK were directed to participate in the NTS under Section 72 and 73 of the Immigration Act 2016. Given this change to statutory responsibilities, Angus Council Children and Learning Committee was asked to and formally agreed participation in the mandated NTS [Report 303/21](#).
- 3.5 Since the commencement of mandatory participation in 2021, there have been 3,432 children transferred under the NTS, of whom 233 have been welcomed into Scottish local authority care. At the end of August 2022, the threshold for the number of UASC that each Local Authority is responsible for was increased from 0.07% to 0.1% of the total child population.

4. CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 Angus Council have received 7 young people through the NTS. All have been aged 16 or 17 and have been accommodated in supported lodgings placements and independent flats on a case-by-case basis. Our approach has been to support young people to make connections and we have found significant benefit from some young people being placed in housing close together to enable mutual support.
- 4.2 Sourcing appropriate care arrangements continues to be a significant challenge both locally and nationally. It is estimated that 30% of young people in the NTS are now below the age of 16 years. It is highly likely that we will be required to receive younger children over the course of the coming year. This will result in increased demand for family based care and/or residential places. The local demand for both foster and residential care currently outstrips provision, a matter which has been subject of a separate [report 409/22](#).
- 4.3 Our approach to the NTS has been to proactively court referrals that match our local supported lodging placements and independent living accommodation availability. This has supported one young person to come to Angus in a more planned way and benefit from matched peer support. It has also kept the wider resource implications of meeting our obligations under the NTS comparatively manageable. Universal and targeted advertising for supporting lodgings providers has continued with young people's involvement in advertising and a dedicated information page on our Angus Fostering and Adoption [website](#) has been developed. Despite these continued efforts, we have fewer than 5 of these types of placements approved.
- 4.4 One of the identified risks to UASC on arrival in the United Kingdom is from organised trafficking and exploitation. In some cases, a child's journey will have been facilitated by an organised gang for the purpose of exploitation and involvement in criminal activity. To keep children arriving through the NTS safe, emphasis is placed on initial relationship building and engagement with new arrivals in Angus including supported pick up from the transfer point. A comprehensive package of support is led by the Angus Horizon Team which includes ensuring that young people have access to a Guardian from the Independent Child Trafficking Guardian Service in place for (or where possible before) their arrival in Angus. Workers also have initial conversations around trafficking at the point of arrival and ensure young people have access to phones and UK sim cards as many young people arrive without either.
- 4.5 Since the commencement of the NTS, one young person accommodated in Angus has gone missing. A partnership child protection response was instigated immediately. The young person, who is aged over 16, has not returned to Angus.
- 4.6 We have recently received communication from COSLA on our anticipated position over the course of the next few rotas. It is difficult to accurately predict demand because each rota allocation depends on many factors, based primarily on the number of children arriving to the

UK to areas which exceed the threshold of 0.1%. However, our working assumption is that Angus will receive a minimum of 7 children within the year.

4.7 Current funding levels for each young person received into local authority are set out below:

Category	£ per child per night
Local authorities at or above 0.07%	£143
Local authorities below 0.07%	£114
Individual children transferred from local authorities above 0.07% to local authorities below 0.07%	£143

4.8 At different points, various 'incentive' payments have been offered to local authorities, for example one-off additional payments if transfers are completed within 5 working days. We have taken these incentive opportunities where possible in order to maximise funding available to offer tailored supports. At the time of writing, funding rates were due to be re-assessed at the end of 2022/23 financial year.

4.9 The current level of funding has met the costs of supported lodgings and housing, independent living payments for our UASC and has enabled the employment of a temporary worker to lead on UASC resettlement. It remains unclear what impact the review of funding will have. Should we have to place children in fostering or residential provision (where the weekly cost is greater), it is likely the current UASC budget will come under pressure as Angus allocations increase. It is also important to note that the funding made available to support UASC once they reach the age of 18 years, reduces significantly. Despite our ongoing enhanced legal and financial obligations toward them under Continuing Care legislation. Where the young person's immigration status remains unresolved, their support costs continue to be met by the local authority from a reduced grant placing further pressure on the overall budget.

4.10 The UASC that have arrived in Angus have mostly settled very well and are integrated into their communities in education/training, social activities and are a very welcome addition to Angus. The tailored support offered from a range of agencies and coordinated by the Horizon team has enabled our young people to access support and services to meet their ongoing cultural, religious, health and recovery needs. Partners in Angus continue to meet their corporate parenting responsibilities towards our UASC. Having bespoke support hosted in the Horizon team further ensures our UASC receive the support they are entitled to as care experienced young people.

4.11 The next 12 months are likely to be increasingly challenging as it is likely we will see younger children being referred under the NTS. This will require the sourcing of foster or residential placements with a high likelihood these will be external to Angus. This is based on projection of our internal resource the experience of other Scottish local authorities who have received younger children. We continue to engage with national groups including through COSLA and Social Work Scotland in planning and exploring options to address the significant resource pressures faced by local authorities.

4.12 Our approach continues to be to proactively identify suitable care arrangements for UASC including appropriate housing, support packages and supported lodgings. We have excellent relationships with national colleagues and take a proactive approach to matching young people to our resource when it is identified as opposed to waiting 'our turn' on the rota. We believe this proactive approach has been successful in matching UASC to Angus and building our UASC community.

5. PROPOSALS

5.1 It is proposed that members of the Children and Learning Committee;

- (i) Note the progress and future challenges in respect of receiving, supporting, and integrating unaccompanied asylum-seeking children into Angus communities
- (ii) Be aware that corporate parenting responsibilities extend to this group of children and young people

- (iii) Require the Director of Children, Families and Justice to bring a future report should any significant resource issues emerge in meeting the local authority's obligations arising under the National Transfer Scheme.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

As detailed in section 4 above, at the time of writing, the Home Office UASC funding levels remained under review and the impact of any change cannot therefore be assessed. There are likely financial implications should we receive children or young people under the age of 16 years through the NTS as they will require access to foster or residential placements (and other local services) on a long term basis.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and is attached.

NOTE: No background papers, as detailed by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report.

REPORT AUTHOR: Kirsty Lee, Service Leader, Child Protection and Justice

EMAIL DETAILS: childrenandlearning@angus.gov.uk



Equality Impact/Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment Form

Name of Proposal

UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM SEEKING CHILDREN SUPPORT

Is this only a **screening** Equality Impact Assessment **Yes**

(A) If Yes, please choose from the following options **all** reasons why a full EIA/FSD is not required:

- | | | |
|-------|---|-----|
| (i) | It does not impact on people | No |
| (ii) | It is a percentage increase in fees which has no differential impact on protected characteristics | No |
| (iii) | It is for information only | Yes |
| (iv) | It is reflective e.g. of budget spend over a financial year | No |
| (v) | It is technical | No |

If you have answered yes to any of points above, please sign off.

Sign off and Authorisation. Please state name, post, and date for each:

Prepared by: Kirsty Lee, Service Leader, April 2023

Reviewed by: Karen Ross, Senior Practitioner, May 2023

Approved by: Kathryn Lindsay, Director of Children Families and Justice, May 2023