

**Report to:** People Scrutiny Committee

**Date of meeting:** 11 March 2021

**By:** Director of Children's Services

**Title:** Scrutiny Review of Support for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) – monitoring report

**Purpose:** To provide the Scrutiny Committee with an update on the action plan arising from the scrutiny review of support for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and other related developments

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## **RECOMMENDATION:**

The People Scrutiny Committee is recommended to consider and comment on the progress set out in the Action Plan attached at Appendix 1 and other related developments discussed in paragraph 2.1.

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## **1 Background**

1.1 The People Scrutiny Committee agreed at its meeting in September 2019 to refer on to Cabinet its scrutiny review regarding support for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). The review report explores a range of issues relating to the challenges facing this especially vulnerable group of children and young people. It contains six recommendations which focus on a number of practical measures which are aimed at complementing the work already being undertaken by the Children's Services Department in this area.

1.2 When the report was presented to Cabinet in November 2019 it included an action plan provided by the Children's Services Department. The plan set out the department's views on the recommendations mentioned above and how they might be implemented. The purpose of this report is to provide an opportunity for the committee to be updated on progress since that time.

## **2 Supporting information**

2.1 The action plan is attached at Appendix 1 and has been updated with further comments from the department on progress with implementing the People Scrutiny Committee's recommendations. In addition to the comments contained in the action plan, there have been a number of other significant developments relating to support for UASC which will be of interest to the committee:

- In the last 12 months the UASC team has continued to grow and develop. For example, this has included the appointment of a Personal Advisor who provides support to Care Leavers and the provision of a placement for a Student Social Worker. A Newly Qualified Social Worker also finished her assessed and supported year in employment and has remained in the team.

- The last year has been challenging both as a result of the COVID pandemic and because of a sharp increase in the number of young people in the care of East Sussex County Council (ESCC). There were a number of spontaneous arrivals, many in small boats. The number of small boats arriving nationally was significant and as a result ESCC honoured a commitment to support colleagues in Kent and Portsmouth by taking a number of new arrivals via the National Transfer Scheme.
- The service is currently working with a total of 113 young people. This is comprised of 57 UASC and 56 Care Leavers aged over 18. In the last 12 months 43 young people came into the care of ESCC. Of those, 29 were spontaneous arrivals and 13 were accepted via the National Transfer Scheme. At present the UASC population in the care of ESCC totals 0.06% of the child population against a nationally agreed commitment of 0.07%.
- Ongoing work with the UK Borders Agency and Police colleagues to build awareness of newly arrived UASC as victims of smuggling and trafficking rather than as perpetrators of crime.
- Identifying a significant gap in provision for supporting the mental health of young people and exploring resources locally and nationally. This has included accessing independent therapeutic input. There is an emphasis on mental health at My Voice Matters reviews for young people in the care of ESCC to ensure any needs are identified early.
- There is also a shortage of resources locally to assess learning needs when a young person does not have English as their first language or has not been educated in a 'Eurocentric' way. Without expert assessment, it is difficult to advocate for and access specialist support for young people. This is being explored with colleagues in CAMHS (the acronym CAMHS stands for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and refers to NHS services that assess and treat young people with emotional, behavioural or mental health difficulties).
- Building links with colleagues in Adult Social Care to raise awareness of the continuing support needs of a small proportion of asylum-seeking young people who may have learning needs or mental health issues which impact on their capacity to live independently.
- Developing skills as a service in acknowledging and supporting the cultural needs of UASC. This includes developing a better knowledge of cultural differences, resources and of life in different parts of the world. It also means that the workers are better at having conversations with young people about what it is like for them to be living in East Sussex where there is less cultural diversity than in other parts of the country.
- The further development of links with Brighton and Hove City Council and West Sussex County Council UASC teams in support of sharing learning and knowledge.

### **3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations**

3.1 Progress continues to be made on implementing the recommendations contained in the People Scrutiny Committee's review as evidenced in Appendix 1 and with regard to the developments discussed above. As a result, it is recommended that the Committee consider and comment on the progress made on implementing the recommendations and the developments set out in paragraph 2.1.

#### **STUART GALLIMORE**

Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Liz Rugg, Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care

Tel. no: 01273 481274

Email: [liz.rugg@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:liz.rugg@eastsussex.gov.uk)

#### **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 - Action Plan – commentary by the Children's Services Department on progress with implementing the recommendations

Appendix 2 - People Scrutiny Committee – Scrutiny Review of Support for UASC