

Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 14 May 2019

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

Item number 7.14
Executive/routine
Wards
Council Commitments

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 The Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee is asked to:
 - 1.1.1 note this update on the council's accommodation of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

Alistair Gaw

Director of Communities and Families

Contact: Andy Jeffries

E-mail: andrew.jeffries@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 469 3857

Report

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report describes the nature and scale of accommodation provided in Edinburgh to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

3. Background

- 3.1 The committee in December 2016 requested a report on the Council's response to the national transfer scheme for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. At that time, the legislation to implement such a scheme was not yet in place and the request for such a report was put on hold.

4. Main report

- 4.1 The legislation allowing for young people to be transferred from local authorities in England to local authorities in Scotland is now in place. The aim of this legislation was to reduce the pressure on local authorities in the south east of England where large numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) first present on arrival in the UK. We have agreed to consider any transfer request involving a young person who has a connection to Edinburgh or who expresses a desire to move to Edinburgh. We have had preliminary discussions with local authorities in the south east of England about some individual cases however the young people concerned have opted to remain in the south east of England as that is where they want to be. It would not be appropriate to put pressure on young people to move to Edinburgh who do not wish to reside in Edinburgh.
- 4.2 We continue to accommodate and support a large number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Edinburgh. During 2016 and 2017 we had a large influx of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people arriving in Edinburgh on an unplanned basis. The vast majority of these young people were from Vietnam and were potential victims of trafficking. This took the number of UASC accommodated in Edinburgh from an average of 2 or 3 to over 40 in the space of two years. All of these young people continue to be supported by the local authority in various ways. In 2016 we accommodated 5 young people in Edinburgh under the Dubs agreement, all of whom remain with us. These young people had previously resided in the Calais “jungle” camp before it was closed. We continue to accommodate and support young unaccompanied minors who spontaneously arrive in the city, for example three young people presented in the city over the Christmas 2018 period and have been accommodated. Given that the costs of looking after UASC are usually far greater than the reimbursement we receive from government, and given that resources in the city are already stretched, we do not have the capacity to offer support to further Dubs cases but will continue to prioritise the support we offer to those young people who spontaneously present in the city. We will also continue to consider any transfer requests from the south east of England.
- 4.3 Regarding the funding available from central government to reimburse local authorities looking after UASCs, there has been extensive discussion within COSLA and between COSLA and other UK local authorities and further representation has been made to the Home Office. However this has not resulted in increased funding and there is no indication that this will change in the near future.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 The service will respond to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children on an individual basis in ways that are proportionate to need and risk.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 The cost of accommodating an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child in a residential unit is greater than £100K per year. At one point there were significant numbers of UASC in residential care. However we have managed the impact of this by recruiting host families for some of the young people and setting up shared flats for others where that is assessed as being in their best interests. This has helped us to manage the impact of the UASC population on children's services budgets.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 Not applicable

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 Not applicable

9. Appendices

None.