

Education, Children and Families Committee

10am, Tuesday, 23 January 2024

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

Executive/routine
Wards
Council Commitments

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 The Education, Children and Families Committee is asked to:
 - 1.1.1 Note the changing position in demand and the associated pressure on the budget.
 - 1.1.2 Note the requirement to realign the service to continue to meet the increased need within available resources.

Amanda Hatton

Executive Director for Children's, Education and Justice Services

Contact: Kathy Henwood, Service Director for Children's and Justice Services

E-mail: Kathy.Henwood@edinburgh.gov.uk

Report

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 An increase in Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASCs), through spontaneous arrivals and the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) has created unprecedented demand on social work, accommodation, and support services.
- 2.2 This is not matched by additionality of resource.
- 2.3 This unpredictable demand has left young people of 16 plus years being placed in residential and homeless accommodation.
- 2.4 This approach risks the unintended consequence of displacing Edinburgh's young people to out of area placements, when local accommodation options are at capacity.
- 2.5 Service delivery is being reviewed to consider how best, to offset the need for emergency responses leading to high-level and costly packages of residential care.
- 2.6 Any strategy needs to embrace the needs of all children and young people as belonging to Edinburgh and having equality and rights at the fore.

3. Background

- 3.1 City of Edinburgh Council has seen a year-on-year increase in the number of UASCs, mainly through spontaneous presentations. See table below:

Year	Total	Spontaneous	NTS	18+ NTS	NRPF
2023/24	34	24	5	5	1
2022/23	10	9	1	0	30
2021/22	7	7	0	0	15
2020/21	8	8	0	0	

- 3.2 Family cases who present with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) identified in red, have 2 FTE social workers, funded by Scottish Government, in recognition of the complexity of the work. There is no such funding to staff UASCs and the NTS.

- 3.3 All young people under the age of 18 years who present through the NTS or as UASC require to be considered under the legislative framework of being Looked After. This requires the provision of supported accommodation until 21 years and advice and support to 26 years, with City of Edinburgh Council holding responsibility as corporate parents.

4. Main Report

- 4.1 City of Edinburgh Council is actively supporting 61 young people who have presented as UASCs or NTS over the last few years.
- 4.2 These young people are supported in a range of accommodations across the city including Foster Care, CEC Residential Accommodation, Independent Living Accommodation and more recently the use of Homelessness Accommodation.
- 4.3 We receive Home Office support funding for each young person at a rate of £798 per week for under 18s and £270 per week for over 18s. While this income covers the basic weekly accommodation costs in Foster Care and Independent Living Accommodation, for young people up to age 18 years, it does not cover cost in more specialist accommodations, nor the continuing care costs for those young people 18-21 years of age. The Home Office Funding also does not cover the cost of the dedicated UASC support team. Increasing demand is placing the service under extreme pressure.

Accommodation by Provider	Number	Basic weekly accommodation costs	Home Office support - weekly rates
CEC Foster mainstream	5	11-15 years £442 -£ 646 16 years plus £515 -£719	Under 18 -£798 Over 18 - £270 Under 18 NTS -£1001
CEC Continuing Care Fostering	2	Ranging £515 -£750	Over 18s - £270
CEC Residential	8	Ranging £2500-£4600	Under 18 -£798 Over 18 - £270 Under 18 NTS -£1001
Fostering - other agencies	1	Ranging £750-£1600	Under 18 -£798 Over 18 - £270 Under 18 NTS -£1001
Residential - other agencies	2	Ranging £3300-£3900	Under 18 -£798 Over 18 - £270 Under 18 NTS -£1001
Supported Accommodation	3	Ranging £690-900	Under 18 -£798 Over 18 - £270 Under 18 NTS -£1001
Independent accommodation	21	Ranging £440 -£800	Under 18 -£798 Over 18 - £270 Under 18 NTS -£1001
Homeless accommodation	19	Ranging £600-£800	Under 18 -£798 Over 18 - £270 Under 18 NTS -£1001

- 4.4 The need to reduce the numbers of UASC 16- and 17-year-old young people in homeless and residential accommodation is a working priority, but complicated by the unpredictability of spontaneous arrivals, the organised nature of young people's presentation in Edinburgh and the association with organised crime, high risk and vulnerability.
- 4.5 Some local authorities are using supported lodgings and other supported accommodation for those young people aged 16 plus. Work is progressing in Edinburgh to consider the practice guidance, commissioning and recruitment resource required to progress this as a meaningful option.
- 4.6 There is a need to ensure we can provide suitable, age, and need appropriate options, prioritising supported and independent living accommodation. This can be achieved by reviewing our internal residential resources and by considering flexible contract solutions, which can provide for the level of support required, as need presents.
- 4.7 We are scoping our internal residential resource to consider potential alterations and registration, to make best use of any existing accommodation and potential additionality to meet need.
- 4.8 Consideration is being given to commissioning more supported and independent living accommodation, scaling up to 30 places in the short term to meet the current requirement, in line with legislation, to a consistent and needs-led approach.
- 4.9 There is a need for increased staffing, as a dedicated resource, to ensure a responsive service that could offset the numbers of young people requiring high-cost, resource intensive residential accommodation and/or homeless accommodation. Both sit outside of the allowances that can be reclaimed.

5. Next steps

- 5.1 We will require to consider how we deploy and support staffing resources to continue to provide the required level of service. If we are successful in reducing accommodation costs, there may be an opportunity to divert funding to provide enhanced staffing levels.
- 5.2 With the right staffing resource, other accommodation options could be progressed at pace, with a renewed campaign to recruit supported lodgings, specialist foster care and /or community-based options.
- 5.3 This would also enable greater dialogue with other Local Authorities and contribution to the national debates around UASC and contextual safeguarding.

6. Financial Impact

- 6.1 The cost of supporting UASC who arrive in our city is already a concerning pressure but handled within available budget. The funding that we receive from the Home Office only covers the cost of standard accommodation and does not meet costs

when more specialist provision is required, and it also does not meet the cost of the staff team who support UASC in the city.

- 6.2 The service is at capacity and without action to realign the supports available this will become a significant pressure in the coming year.

7. Equality and Poverty Impact

- 7.1 The protection and prevention agendas, around organised crime, exploitation, poverty and trauma need to be recognised and actively addressed to ensure that UASC, whatever their circumstances, are afforded the right support and protection, in line with their individual needs.
- 7.2 There is emerging data supporting the disproportionate number of Vietnamese young people within the spontaneous presentations in Edinburgh. This is an area of work to be further scrutinised, under our contextual safeguarding and protection agendas. The dedicated staffing resource will lead on this.

8. Climate and Nature Emergency Implications

- 8.1 The requirement to ensure that Edinburgh's children and young people can be cared for within their own families and or communities is key in mitigating against unwarranted travel and transport requirements and associated impact/costs. The need to secure local accommodation options are central to meeting this need.

9. Risk, policy, compliance, governance and community impact

- 9.1 The increase in the numbers of spontaneous UASC arrivals raises concerns in terms of practice, strategic approach, and provision of resource.
- 9.2 Alongside the individual experience and associated trauma and vulnerability, there is a wider agenda around organised crime that needs to be explored. This has the potential to spill out into accommodation and communities, extending young people's risk and vulnerabilities. This requires safe accommodation, alongside dedicated support, access to independent advocacy and multi-agency protection and care planning.
- 9.3 This increase in numbers is captured on service risk registers.

10. Background reading/external references

- 10.1 N/A

11. Appendices

- 11.1 N/A