

Local Government Association briefing

Local authority support for child refugees

2 November 2017



Key messages

- Councils have a strong track record in welcoming asylum seeking children. Working with central government, national partners and regional bodies, councils showed great leadership in building additional capacity for children from the Calais camp. As well as volunteering to support children resettled in their area, councils freed up social workers to assess children before their arrival in the UK and to undertake assessments of new families in the UK often with only a day's notice and with limited information on the needs of the children.
- At the moment, funding rates only cover part of the cost of support. Councils wish to ensure that the needs of new arrivals under any system can be met effectively. In order to provide effective support, local government needs full recovery of costs and better real-time information.
- The challenges faced by councils in ensuring that the needs of children can be met are not just financial but also relate to access to therapeutic services, places to learn English, legal advice, and translation services. We need a conversation across government and with other partners to enable access to these services.
- Councils continue to work hard to support the many programmes for refugees and asylum seekers currently in operation. In addition to unaccompanied children seeking asylum in the UK, councils also directly support children in families through the resettlement schemes, and children in destitute families whose asylum applications have been refused by the Home Office. We need greater alignment of these programmes so any ongoing needs can be met without creating unsustainable pressure on local services.

Supporting children from Calais

The Government has confirmed more than 900 unaccompanied children have been brought to the UK under both the family reunification provisions of the Dublin Regulation and the terms of section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016.¹ This includes more than 750 children from France as part of the UK's support for the Calais camp clearance; almost half of the unaccompanied children who were in the camp at the time of the clearance. Information about the different types of support is included below.

Local authorities are required to assess any placements made with family members other than parents to ensure that the child's needs can be met prior to arrival. The majority of children from the Calais camp arrived via this 'Dublin III' route.

¹ www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2016-12-21/HL4346/

Councils were asked to notify their Regional Strategic Migration Partnership if they are able to offer any placements for unaccompanied children, with children placed in local authorities' care via the National Transfer Scheme.

The Department of Education have clarified the sort of accommodation that can be used and the statutory responsibilities of councils, with further information to be released as part of the forthcoming Safeguarding Strategy.² This and other information is available on the LGA website at www.local.gov.uk/refugees.

Sustainable and sufficient funding

Councils require long-term funding arrangements from the Government so that they can fulfil their statutory duties to support children starting a new life in the UK, both under the direct care of councils and within families.

Enhanced funding rates introduced in July 2016 for unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) represented an increase of between 20 to 33 per cent on previous daily rates.³ However, councils tell us this is not enough to meet the cost of support. Using data provided by dozens of responding local authorities, a report from the Association of Directors of Children Services (ADCS) indicated that the grant funding provided by the Home Office covers on average 50 per cent of the costs of caring for a UASC.⁴ The current funding levels remain inadequate and will require a significant uplift to ensure children can be effectively supported.

There were 2,944 asylum applications from UASC in the year ending June 2017.⁵ LGA research on revenue outturn figures shows that councils were forced to overspend their budgets for unaccompanied asylum seeking children by more than 75 per cent in 2015/16, the single biggest proportionate overspend across children's services.⁶ Councils spent in excess of £113 million on support for these children in 2015/16, £48 million over budget.

Councils welcomed the inclusion of Dublin III arrivals as part of a current government funding review. This review must result in additional funding both for the initial assessment and to ensure those placed with family members can be supported well after their arrival. There needs to be greater clarity on what new families can access to support themselves and how any costs to local government, for example where placements are supported to avoid break down, will be recognised. Although there is no collation of data centrally of costs to local authorities, our members report having to support families financially to keep them together, particularly when family members are dispersed asylum seekers on low incomes and when their asylum claim fails.

Funding effective support for any new arrivals is in the context of the pressures caused by rising demand and insufficient funding for asylum seeking children and on the care system as whole. Over the last 10 years councils have coped with sharply increasing demand for children's social care. 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

² [Safeguarding strategy for unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children](#), November 2016

³ [Unaccompanied asylum seeking children and leaving care: funding instructions, October 2016](#)

⁴ Special thematic [report](#) on unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children, ADCS, October 2016

⁵ Immigration statistics April to June 2017, August 2017

⁶ LGA analysis of DCLG statistics of local authority revenue expenditure
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/local-authority-revenue-expenditure-and-financing>

⁷ [Children looked after in England including adoption: 2016 to 2017](#)

This is on top of a 140 per cent increase in child protection enquiries and a 94 per cent increase in the rate of children starting on child protection plans, all at a time when government grants to councils have been reducing. 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.⁸ 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.

By 2020 there will be a funding gap in children's services of at least £2 billion, alongside significant resource pressures across local government services as whole.⁹ Councils must not be forced to choose between funding support for unaccompanied children or their existing population of children in need of care.

Children will also need school places that can meet their needs, therapeutic services, places to learn English, legal advice, and translation services, and councils and their partners are raising concerns around access to these. We need a conversation across government around enabling and maintaining access to these vital services. Unaccompanied children in the UK enter the care of a local authority and should have the same rights as a child who enters the care system for any other reason.

Managing risks

Planned arrivals with better transparent information are essential to ensure councils can plan effectively, ensure there is sufficient capacity for new arrivals and assure themselves that children are safe. Ensuring better information on the needs of the child in advance of transfer would also help inform the assessment process and resettlement in the UK. Councils would welcome joint work with government and other partners to minimise the possible risks of absconding, particularly given the risk around the uncertain future status of asylum seeking children.

Governance arrangements need to be established to facilitate transparent and strategic joint working between government departments, local government, and national organisations.

Types of support for unaccompanied children

Councils and their partners support a range of programmes for refugees and asylum seeking children. Clear links need to be made across all the programmes that resettle asylum seekers and refugees to make sure there is enough funding and support available. The various programmes include:

- **Dublin III Regulation children:** Children can arrive to be reunited with family members already in the UK via the ongoing Dublin III Regulation obligations. Under current EU law, an unaccompanied child can apply to be reunited with their close family members in any state that is a signatory of the Dublin Convention, also known as the Dublin III Regulation. It is currently unclear what impact leaving the European Union will have on this and may remain so until a deal is negotiated.
- **'Dubs amendment' children:** In May 2016 the Government announced, as part of an amendment to the Immigration Act 2016, that it will be resettling unaccompanied children from other European countries into the UK – France,

⁸ Fostering Network [media release](#), January 2016

⁹ [Bright Futures: Getting the Best for Children, Young People and Families](#), LGA, October 2017

Italy and Greece – with the number of children brought under this scheme to be agreed in partnership with local government and following liaison with the countries the children are currently are living in. Unaccompanied children arriving through this route are placed into the care of councils through the Home Office-run ‘National Transfer Scheme’.

- **Spontaneous or clandestine arrivals:** under previous regulations, unaccompanied children claiming asylum after their (illegal) entry to the UK were the responsibility of the council where they first presented as a child in need of care. As numbers increased, this has caused capacity issues for those areas which are ports of entry to the UK. The National Transfer Scheme is designed to achieve a more equitable distribution to address these.
- **Vulnerable Persons (formerly the Syrian) Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and the Vulnerable Children’s Resettlement Scheme:** 8,535 people have been resettled across 246 UK local authorities since the scheme began. Around half (51 per cent) of those resettled under the VPRS were under 18 years old (2,872)¹⁰. Councils receive funding for five years as a contribution to the costs for families resettling in the UK. The long-term funding, regional leadership, and early involvement of local authorities in the design of the (then) Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme could usefully be replicated across all schemes for all asylum seekers and refugees.
- **Failed asylum applications:** Councils support large numbers of children in destitute families whose asylum applications have been refused by the Home Office. There is no government funding provided for this.

¹⁰ [Immigration statistics April to June 2017](#), August 2017