

**REPORT TO:** Cabinet

**MEETING DATE:** 9 November 2021

**BY:** Executive Director of Education and Children's Services

**SUBJECT:** Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

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## **1 PURPOSE**

To report to Cabinet on the National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and seek approval for East Lothian Council's participation in the scheme.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to endorse and support East Lothian Council's involvement in supporting Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children through the National Transfer Scheme as outlined in this report.

## **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1.1 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) refers to children and young people under the age of 18 years old, who are unaccompanied when entering the country seeking asylum.
- 3.1.2 The National Transfer Scheme (NTS) refers to the Scheme that allows any area or region of the UK which is under strain due to the number of UASC's, to transfer to another area. The scheme arranges such a move. Local Authorities supporting more than 0.07% of their total child population is the threshold for application for dispersal to the scheme. This is to ensure that there is a fairer distribution across the UK of UASC and to ensure that this is done in a transparent manner. The rota scheme in England began on 26 July 2021 with all local authorities in England and Wales involved.

3.1.3 COSLA Leaders approved Scotland's participation in the NTS at its meeting at the end of August 2021 and that Scotland would only accept those young people over 16, but under 17 ½ years old.

3.2 Current proposals suggest a total number of UASC for Scotland will be 45 children and young people over each rota cycle and use the same weightings for allocation of numbers (ONS data) as suggested for English Local Authorities:

Child population	25%
Looked After Child per 10k	22%
UASC per 10k	10%
Former UASC care leavers per 10k	10%
Supported asylum population per 10k	33%

3.3 As noted, the Scheme began on 26 July 2021. By 9 August 2021 (14 days later) 114 young people had been referred through the NTS. Each rota cycle is 650, and it had been suggested it would take approximately a year to work through a cycle. The early figures suggest that this will be much quicker (11-12 weeks) for each cycle. Any UASC taken in Scotland since 26 July 2021 will count towards Scotland's overall number of 45. Many Scottish Local Authorities have already taken young people. To date East Lothian has not taken any UASC under this scheme.

3.4 The assessed position is that the rate of dispersals will slow down as the situation at the ports ease and the system embeds. However more Local Authorities will then reach the 0.07% and will be eligible to refer into the scheme rather than take from the scheme. This means that the impact on spontaneous arrivals may also be seen through this system although participation in the NTS, will not prevent the possibility of further spontaneous arrivals.

3.5 The proposed rota would see East Lothian take one young person per cycle. If the cycle remains at the current pace, that could mean one young person every 12 weeks. COSLA has advised that there may be advantages in taking more than one young person as services can be pooled, developed and utilised better for a small group, as opposed to the same support for only one young person.

3.6 It is therefore recommended that East Lothian Council accepts two UASC young people in the first cycle, resulting in us not being asked to take another young people in the next cycle. Most UASC are currently arriving by small boat, it is expected that this will reduce over the winter months.

3.7 The use of the My Place Project has been identified as a possible/preferred option for the UASC scheme. This is an accommodation with support option in East Lothian, with three bedded tenancies to house two care leavers and a peer flatmate in each house. Visiting support is currently provided by The Rock Trust. Our aim would be to transport young people from the port directly into accommodation and be settled within the community. Costs are covered through existing funding streams. We would plan to take two UASC young people in the first cycle which would allow us to carefully plan and review the

support and accommodation ahead of any future cycles. Alongside accommodation, we will need to ensure a cross-service support package that will also include support from the third sector and other partnerships.

- 3.8 A short life working group has been established to oversee this scheme and also the Afghan Resettlement Scheme. Housing have agreed to take the lead on setting this up given their expertise and experience with the Syrian Resettlement project. Although the UASC scheme is different, there is logic in the group discussing and agreeing our approach for both schemes together. This group will include representation from NHS Lothian, Police Scotland, Education, and Children's Services, East Lothian Works (ESOL), DWP, Housing, Tenancy Support, Interpretation, Connected Communities and the voluntary sector via VCEL.

#### **4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 There are no direct policy implications associated with the report recommendations.

#### **5 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 5.1 The subject of this report does affect the wellbeing of the community and has a significant impact on equality, the environment or economy.

#### **6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Financial – Local Authorities supporting children and young people through this scheme receive a contribution from the Home Office. For those under 18 this is £143 per day. For those over 18, this reduces to £270 per week. This will meet some but not all costs for young people depending on their age and how long the support is required.
- 6.2 Personnel - This area of work is specialist. We currently have some expertise in Children's Services, to provide age assessments and support. We also have other transferrable expertise across different services that has been utilised for the Syrian Families Resettlement Project. This group of young people require a high level of support initially which will require intense staff input.

#### **7 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 7.1 None

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