

Information Report

Scrutiny

Date: 17th November 2021

Subject **Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children**

Purpose To ensure Cabinet Members are briefed on the implementation of the National Transfer Scheme (NTS)

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Ward City wide

Summary This report explores the contribution of Newport City Council in supporting Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) entering care following being dispersed in line with the NTS.

Proposal To ensure Members are fully appraised on the role that Newport City Council has in supporting UASC.

Action by Natalie Poyner

Timetable Immediate

This report was prepared after consultation with:

- The Team Managers in the Pathway Service
- Cardiff City Council
- Sabina Hussain Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
Coordinator Wales Strategic Migration Partnership.
- Karyn Keane Assistant Head of Education Newport City Council
- Liz Hiscocks Deputy Head of Safeguarding Aneurin Bevin UHB
- Karen Keen Head of the Gems Service

1. Introduction

The National Transfer Scheme (NTS) is a UK Government Scheme that forms the basis of a voluntary agreement made between local authorities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to ensure a more equitable distribution of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) across local authority areas. It is intended to ensure that local authorities do not face a disproportionate responsibility in accommodating and looking after unaccompanied children, simply by virtue of being the point of arrival or entry.

Any Local Authority supporting UASC at, or above, 0.07% of their general child population can refer a child into the NTS for transfer to another local authority under the rota arrangement. Each region or nation involved in the NTS takes its turn on the rota in sequence. The expectation will be for that region to fulfil the allocated number of placements at which point responsibility will move on to the next region, and so on. The rota aims to work on a quarterly cycle and therefore regions would be able to effectively plan accommodation and support in preparation for when they next on the rota.

In March 2021 lead officers in both Cardiff and Newport developed a regional pilot proposal to join the National Transfer Scheme on behalf of Wales. Following discussions with the All-Wales Heads of Children's Services, both authorities have had agreement from their councils to scope options for a Wales model for the NTS. Subject to final agreement, the model currently being developed would see Cardiff Council and Newport City Council taking the lead for NTS and accepting NTS placements proportionate to Wales' annual allocation of UASC transfers, approximately 30 children per year, (7-8 per cycle) and therefore, providing the placements and support for any transfer requests under the NTS on behalf of the other 20 Local Authorities in Wales.

Any spontaneous arrivals of young people in Wales would continue to be supported by the Local Authority in which they present, as is currently the case.

2. Finance and accommodation

The Home Office currently awards the Local Authority £143.00 per day per UASC. This rate reduces to £270.00 per week when the young person reaches 18 years. Newport Children Services has a large portfolio of semi supported accommodation for 16-18 year olds at a cost of £45.00 per night. This package includes CCTV and breakfast. There is ongoing commitment from the 4C's (the consortium supporting the framework to commission placements across Wales) to assist Local Authorities in identifying foster carers for children under the age of 16 years.

3. Collaboration with stakeholders

In order to develop and enhance existing service provision for this group of young people Newport is collaborating with Education, Gems, Housing, Connected Communities, third party organisations such as the Sanctuary, Health, Cardiff City Council, the Welsh Strategic Migration Partnership and Welsh Government. There are strategic and operational meetings that take place regularly and an identified project lead employed by Cardiff City Council financed by Welsh Government. The role of the project lead is to undertake and support the regional work around a response to the NTS, including coordinating and liaising with partners around the safe placements of UASC cases in the region and developing a performance dashboard to ensure that there is pertinent and effective data collection of information to enable robust monitoring and evaluation of this regional agreement for Wales.

4. Case studies

AA 15 Years, 7 Months

AA was transferred to Newport City Council via the National Transfer Scheme having been rescued by a Border Force Vessel. AA is from Syria and fled with his family to Libya. AA is the eldest child of a sibling group of 4. AA attempted to seek employment in Libya however the war prevented this as it became unsafe to

live. AA left his parents and travelled from Libya to Italy. It is understood that AA's Uncle paid for people smugglers, who put him on a boat and on route the boat began to sink which resulted in a ship rescuing him. AA was then transported by the ship to Italy where he was held in a camp until release. AA travelled to France and then by a small boat from Calais to Dover. AA is currently in debt to his uncle and is expected to pay him 3000 US dollars.

AA and his parents wished for him to travel to the UK for a better life and were part of arranging his travel to the UK. AA reports that his parents want to come to the UK also and as he is the eldest child he made the journey to make this happen

DD 17 Years, 1 Month

DD has been in the UK since July 2021 arriving in the UK in a boat across the channel. Port authorities in Kent first took DD and held him in a building which had many other asylum seekers present. DD was briefly interviewed before being taken to a hotel. DD comes from a family of four, consisting of himself, his parents and his sister. DD comes from a village named Arab Qoy, which is near the city of Kirkuk. Prior to the war, DD was in school studying and his father was a farmer.

DD left Iraq in 2018, his family were internally displaced and ended up in a camp for refugees. Following the US withdrawal from Iraq violence broke out in the region and DD's family went to another village in Iraq, spending at least four years there. The Iraqi government built the camp for displaced people. DD describes the camp as a "disaster". DD remembers that when rain was coming down the camp would be flooded. Life was described as miserable in Iraq, so when they were able to, smugglers took DD's family out of the country through to Istanbul, Turkey. DD does not know if his father had to work a debt or had to pay off the smugglers. Fatih, was the area that DD was staying in in Istanbul, his father was able to rent a small apartment and DD worked on the street, selling napkins. His father used to buy them from a wholesale store and sell them to drivers and people on the side of the road. They received no support from the

government in Turkey, as they were living there illegally. DD's family didn't know anyone else who was a refugee at the time and was completely reliant on each other to survive.

DD's father was able to arrange smugglers to take him to a safe place, but the smugglers could only arrange to take them one family member at a time. DD has not spoken to his family since June and does not know where they are. He is not sure if they have come to the UK.

MS 15 Years, 9 Months

MS advised that he left Eritrea when he was 6 years of age with his family as his father was in the military and there were concerns that MS would have to join when he was of age so he left with his mother and siblings so this did not happen. The family walked across the border to Ethiopia with the aim to get to the UK for a better life. MS does not know how long he stayed in Ethiopia but again walked to the border to Hamen. MS went onto say that he is unsure of how long his stay was there but it was only for a short period of time before human traffickers took him to Sudan. The human traffickers then kidnapped him and took him to Libya where he was held for ransom. MM stated that he believes his cousin paid the ransom for him to be released. MM then moved from Libya to Italy by boat and then to Germany where he remained for 5 years in the care of foster carers.

AS 16 Years, 9 Months

AS arrived in the UK in May 2021. On his journey to the UK AS travelled through Turkey-Jungle for a day, he was then put into a van and travelled another 3-4 days (no countries given) and walked a further day to a beach in order to board a boat taking him to the UK. AS had food arranged and paid for by his uncle and travelled with his boyfriend. AS is claiming asylum as he is gay, and his boyfriend's father objected to their sexuality resulting in them fearing for their lives. AS's father is deceased and he doesn't know where his mother and

younger brother are however he has now been reunited with his elder brother who is being supported to seek asylum by Newport City Council.

5. Current position

In recent months UASC arrivals have increased significantly. Kent Children Services have been unable to accept any unaccompanied minors into their care as they are unable to meet their statutory duties to safeguard these young people. Therefore, children arriving at the port in Kent are currently being supported by the Home Office. This situation has impacted the speed of the implementation of the NTS rota across the UK. Since the launch of the new rota system on 26 July, the Home Office has referred 506 children to local authorities, and 406 children have been relocated across the UK. To date Newport has been successful in being able to accommodate and support 8 young people.

It is highly likely that the request of Wales as a region will exceed the annual assumed allocation of 30 children within a very short period of time. The current situation in Afghanistan is also likely to impact the numbers of UASC arriving into the UK. Wales has therefore made a plea to the Home Office to be afforded time to pause and plan when we reach the agreed number for our region. Both Cardiff and Newport wish to ensure that we have built a sufficient infrastructure to support the children and have an opportunity to build resilience within the social work teams and the agencies that will be providing a service. We need to ensure that we have developed enough housing stock and foster carers to accommodate the young people arriving.

6. Next steps

We recently been granted an additional 1 million pound to support Newport and Cardiff in delivering the NTS for the region of Wales. This is a one-off funding award and is to be spent by 31st March 2021. During the proposed pause and plan stage Newport and Cardiff will determine the expenditure areas which may include:

- Starter packs for young people when they arrive
- Training for foster carers, social workers and stakeholders
- Support to authorities accommodating UASC with complex needs

As we know these young people are amongst the most vulnerable people to reach UK shores, they brave threat to life, exploitation, trafficking and hunger to get here and then have to navigate the complex asylum system in a foreign language. Sadly existing services for these young people are working in silo and can be confusing and difficult to access. Children Services is therefore proposing to develop an integrated “One Stop Shop” for UASC and families seeking asylum in collaboration with key stakeholders such as connected communities, housing, education, health and third sector organisations. A multi-agency strategic group has been set up to lead on this proposal.