MY Response - Education Committee Inquiry on Children's Social Care

Summary

1. Migration Yorkshire provides strategic leadership and local support across the Yorkshire and Humber region. We work with national, regional and local partners to ensure that the region can deal with, and benefit from, migration. Our role includes the Strategic Migration Partnership function for the Yorkshire and Humber region

2. We welcome the opportunity to respond to this call for evidence. Our response is informed by our strategic coordination work supporting Local Authorities children's services teams, Home Office and the Department for Education with the National Transfer Scheme. Our response relates specifically to unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) and young refugees within the children's social care system.

3. We chose only to respond to questions in the call for evidence that we feel able to. These include questions **1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 12,**

13, 14.

4. Our response is summarised as follows:

- The required speed of the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) often results in unsuitable placements for unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC). Due to a lack of placement sufficiency, UASC are frequently placed out of area and through expensive private foster agencies.
- UASC arrive with a specific set of complex needs formed by their experiences, which requires a trauma informed approach to care and support.

Question 1: Is the current provision of children's social care sufficient to meet demand?

5. The national transfer scheme (NTS)was established to enable the safe transfer of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) in the UK from one local authority to another local authority. There are delays in getting children transferred through this scheme due to a lack of placement capacity to accommodate them in the receiving local authority. This delay causes distress to children, impacts their ability to settle into life in the UK, as well as putting further pressure on the entry local authority waiting to transfer the child.

Question 2: What factors are causing the increase in demand for children's social care?

6. Arrivals through the NTS have increased dramatically with UASC now constituting an increasing percentage of local authority's (LA's) looked after children figure. LA's are facing significant challenges to find appropriate placements for these young people, with some LA's in Yorkshire & Humber region using significant capital to purchase properties or contract placements through expensive private foster agencies. Some LA's in our region have recruited new teams within children's social services to work specifically with UASC and young refugees due to the high level of demand. Referrals to children's services from adult asylum hotels, from young people claiming to be aged under 18, have increased dramatically especially since the Home Office's 'hotel optimisation' programme began in August 2023. These young people must be age assessed by LA social workers and if found to be under 18, the LA must find them a suitable placement and give all relevant support to them as a child looked after. These children fall outside of the NTS process, LA's receive less funding to care for them and they also cannot plan for the arrival of these children in terms of placement capacity and social work resource. The age assessment process itself is very resource heavy for local authorities. Whilst the development of the Home Office National Age Assessment Board (NAAB) is designed to ease this pressure for some LA's, there will not be enough resource within the NAAB to meet the demand.

Question 3: What are the recent trends and causes of out-of-area placements?

7. The nature of the NTS requires children to move into local authority care quickly. Additional funding incentivises transfers to take place within 5 days, meaning speed of transfer is the main focus. If LA's don't have sufficient or suitable placement capacity in their area, they will often place young people out of area in order to meet the 5 day deadline outlined in the NTS protocol. When children are under 16 but age disputed by the Home Office, LA's often struggle to find a foster placement due to safeguarding or other concerns from carers, which forces LA's to seek placements out of area which are often through expensive private operators.

Question 5: The reasons behind the rising cost of children's social care for local authorities, and ways to mitigate this;

8. The increasing demand of the NTS on LA's has not been matched with investment in creating placement sufficiency. Lack of suitable placements and increase in UASC arrivals has driven an increase in usage of private independent foster agencies at considerable cost to LA's. Investment in placement creation is much needed across the board to mitigate this.

Question 9: The specific experiences of disabled children or children with additional needs within children's social care, how they differ from their peers, and ways to improve their experiences;

9. Unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) arrive with a specific set of needs formed by their experiences. UASC have

often experienced conflict, violence, or persecution in their home countries and on their journey to the UK. Many have suffered from abuse or detention, and/or have become victims of trafficking and exploitation. As a result of these experiences UASC often carry significant trauma that social services need to be aware of and know how to assist with, including finding suitable placements and providing health and wellbeing support. The UK asylum process itself can be re-triggering for UASC, with long delays on decision making and the age assessment process creating uncertainty, a culture of disbelief and often resulting in missing episodes and deterioration of mental health. UASC often arrive without any English language skills and have their own set of religious or cultural needs. They can suffer from isolation and a lack of social networks, and may require support to pursue family reunion or contact with family. The government's Illegal Migration Act 2023 will have a huge impact on UASC and the social services supporting them. The Act seeks to deny access to the asylum system and offers no opportunity for young people to settle in the UK. These young people may also face removal from the UK upon turning 18. This could increase the risk of young people being exploited or going missing and will have a negative impact on the mental health and wellbeing of vulnerable young people. In order to improve, there is a need for investment in appropriate placements for UASC, recognising their experiences, trauma and additional needs. Full and timely access to education, legal advice, healthcare, wellbeing activities and forming social connections is key. Training for social workers, support workers and foster carers on the specific

needs of UASC is essential in order to support these young people better. A specific 'standard of care' for UASC would assist with this. Alongside the need to support UASC with their additional needs, is the need to treat them as other teenagers that need to build social connections in order to move forward with their lives in the UK.

10. Migration Yorkshire produced a report *'Someone who smiles, that's all you need; Life in Yorkshire and Humber for a young person seeking asylum'* which explored how we can do better at helping young refugees settle in and adapt to life in the UK. The report outlined priorities from the young people's perspective. Link to full report: Someone who smiles - that's all you need - full report.pdf (migrationyorkshire.org.uk). Migration Yorkshire also produced a series of digital stories with young people which allowed them to tell their story in their own words. Link to the digital stories: Hear from young people | Migration Yorkshire

Question 12: The government 's children's social care implementation strategy, Stable Homes, Built on Love, released in February 2023, including:

Question 13: How effective the strategy has been so far,

Question 14: How effective it is projected to be in the long-term.

11. There is a need for appropriate placement provision for UASC, DfE figures indicated a huge increase in UASC within the children looked after figures for 2022 in the *Stable Homes*

report. A mixture of placement types to help tackle isolation and to adjust to life in the UK is essential. Current focus is largely on semi-independent placement provision living alongside peers, while this placement type can suit some young people, a family-based provision within a home can help a lot more with adjusting to life in the UK, learning English and preparing for adulthood. Foster carer recruitment is also essential, we understand DfE planned for a regional programme for foster carer recruitment and retention, including for UASC, within the *Stable Homes* report. We haven't yet seen evidence of this in our region.

This response was completed by Nicola Booth in January 2024.

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