
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

25 January 2022

Cabinet

Title: **Supporting Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children in North Ayrshire**

Purpose: To provide an update on the local and national position regarding unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and to seek approval for the support arrangements proposed within North Ayrshire for accommodating UASC as part of the national humanitarian response.

Recommendation: It is recommended that Cabinet:

- (a) notes the significant work undertaken in recent years to support a number of UASC and families resettling in North Ayrshire, and notes the escalating humanitarian crisis in Kent;
- (b) notes and endorses the accommodation of one UASC in January 2022 placed with a supported carer and approves the accommodating of a further UASC when an appropriate supported carer becomes available;
- (c) notes and agrees participation in the recently announced mandated rota set by the UK Government as part of the revised National Transfer Scheme (NTS), which will potentially see up to a further 6 UASC being accommodated within North Ayrshire in the first year;
- (d) notes the support models which will be considered by the established officer task group to identify the most appropriate support for each individual UASC within North Ayrshire based on their specific needs;
- (e) notes the funding outlined within paragraph 4.1 which will be received to assist the delivery of appropriate UASC support;
- (f) agrees to receive further updates as the humanitarian response continues.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 North Ayrshire Council has a strong track record of providing accommodation and support to assist individuals and families resettling from a number of countries including Syria and Afghanistan. Since 2015, North Ayrshire has welcomed 42 Syrian families and 8 Afghan Families, a total of 238 individuals.

- 1.2 For a number of months, an escalating humanitarian crisis has been emerging in Kent which has seen significant numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) crossing the Channel seeking asylum in the UK. In response to this, and working with COSLA over recent months, a North Ayrshire multi-service officer taskforce was established. The UASC taskforce comprised of staff from across a variety of services and has been meeting regularly to discuss and explore what support could be offered from North Ayrshire to aid this humanitarian crisis. In recent weeks shortly prior to the festive break, there was a further unexpected rise in the number of UASC arriving in the UK, placing a significant further burden on Local Authorities in the southeast of England.
- 1.3 In Scotland, a successful Local Authority voluntary assistance scheme was agreed with COSLA and had been operating for a number of months up to December 2021. This has enabled UASC to be placed across various local authorities that were able to assist. As part of the voluntary rota, North Ayrshire was allocated 2 UASC to be accommodated.
- 1.4 During December 2021, and during the continuing escalation of the emerging crisis, an appropriate supported carer became available within North Ayrshire who was able to assist. Based on the urgency of the evolving situation and the availability of a supported carer, together with the backlog of young people awaiting transfers through the voluntary rota, arrangements were made for one UASC to be placed in North Ayrshire with the available supported carer. Furthermore, it is hoped there will be the potential to take a further UASC shortly based on the anticipated availability of a further suitable supported carer. An active recruitment plan has also been put in place to attract additional supported carers to assist further.
- 1.5 As a result of the increasing international arrivals of UASC in Kent, in December 2021 the UK Government announced it would be implementing a mandated rota for placing UASC. The mandated rota was deemed unavoidable by the UK Government due to the varying levels of support being offered across the UK. There are currently over 350 UASC awaiting to be resettled from the south of England to various parts of the UK, some of whom are being accommodated in hotels.
- 1.6 If Council's accommodated UASC prior to the commencement of the mandated scheme, then this number will be deducted from their national mandated allocation. The mandated allocation of UASC to be accommodated in North Ayrshire could potentially be up to 8 UASC per year. This is dependent however on the numbers arriving in Kent and also on how quickly UASC can be placed in local authorities UK wide.
- 1.7 Each individual UASC has unique support needs depending on their age and other circumstances. This predicated the specific support model appropriate in each case. Further work continues to be progressed by the established officer task group to identify appropriate support models to accommodate each individual UASC within North Ayrshire based on their specific needs.

2. Background

- 2.1 In September 2015 the Council responded to an urgent request from the UK Government and COSLA's Strategic Migration Partnership to assist refugees

displaced from Syria. As a result, the Council made a humanitarian commitment to resettle 100 refugees by March 2020, in line with the UK Government's targeted timescales.

- 2.2 A Syrian Refugee Task Force was established to provide strategic direction and ensure delivery of operational support across all services that would engage with and support the Syrian families. North Ayrshire Council has fully participated in the Syrian Resettlement Programme and, due to meeting its initial target numbers earlier than expected, increased its pledge on two further occasions, taking the overall total to 201 refugees (41 families). The Council met this target and the resettlement of 201 refugees was complete at the end of February 2020.
- 2.3 On 17 June 2019, the UK Government confirmed its ongoing commitment to resettlement post 2020, announcing plans for a new UK Resettlement Scheme which would see thousands more refugees provided with a route to protection. The new scheme is open to refugees identified by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to be in need of resettlement to the UK because of their vulnerability; the scheme does not have a specific geographical focus.
- 2.4 The Council agreed to participate in the new UK Resettlement Scheme and made a commitment to provide a safe haven for a further 30 refugees (6 families) by March 2021. Due to COVID-19 restrictions on movements both overseas and in the UK, the resettlement programme was paused in March 2020 as it was not possible to undertake any refugee resettlement activity.
- 2.5 The Home Office has since recommenced refugee resettlement arrivals throughout the UK and as a result a further Syrian family is due to be resettled in North Ayrshire in January 2022.
- 2.6 During summer 2021 the UK Government also introduced a scheme to relocate locally engaged staff (LES) who worked with UK armed forces in Afghanistan as the local situation in Afghanistan had become increasingly volatile. North Ayrshire Council has fully supported this scheme and at its meeting in August 2021 Cabinet agreed to welcome five Afghan LES and their families. It was also agreed that the Afghan relocation scheme should take priority over the UK Resettlement Scheme. The first two Afghan families arrived and have successfully resettled within the Irvine area. A further three properties have also been identified and prepared for resettling Afghan families and discussions are ongoing with the Home Office to identify further Afghan families for resettlement within these properties.
- 2.7 Since 2015, North Ayrshire has welcomed 42 Syrian families and 8 Afghan Families, a total of 238 individuals. We have received a total of 93 adults and 145 children. All children are engaged in education or early years provision. The comprehensive support networks put in place by the Council's officer taskforce are operating well, and the children have been able to attend school within a few days of arriving. 18 families have been settled within the 3 Towns (Ardrossan, Saltcoats and Stevenston), 22 families have been settled within Irvine/Kilwinning and 10 families have been settled within the Garnock Valley (Dalry / Kilbirnie).
- 2.8 Further to the agreed resettlement schemes, the spontaneous arrival of UASC into North Ayrshire can and has taken place. Since 2018 there have been 7 Vietnamese young males who have arrived in North Ayrshire claiming asylum. All of the young

people were initially placed in a children's house and 4 moved to independent living supported by staff from Throughcare.

North Ayrshire's multi-agency approach to supporting UASC

- 2.9 During October 2016 the Council received an urgent request to respond to the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Calais and to offer a place of safety to children and young people displaced from the container camps. The Council responded positively to this request and made plans to accommodate one child under 16 in a children's unit and five 16–17 year-olds in a 5 bed children's house at Nethermains, Kilwinning.
- 2.10 More recently, and for a number of months now, an escalating humanitarian crisis has been emerging in Kent which has seen significant numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) crossing the Channel seeking asylum in the UK. In response to this, and working with COSLA over recent months, a specific North Ayrshire multi-service officer UASC taskforce was established. A successful Local Authority voluntary assistance scheme was agreed with COSLA and has been operating for a number of months until December 2021. This has enabled UASC to be placed across various local authorities that were able to assist thus far. As part of the voluntary rota, North Ayrshire was allocated 2 UASC to be accommodated. The North Ayrshire UASC taskforce adopted the successful principles of partnership working previously established and comprises of staff from across a variety of services including Children, Families and Justice Services, Education and Housing. It has been meeting regularly to discuss and explore what support could be offered from North Ayrshire to aid this UASC humanitarian crisis.
- 2.11 The officer taskforce has considered a number of accommodation and support models which could be offered to assist in the UASC crisis detailed in Appendix 1. Each individual UASC has unique needs which must be considered. In addition, it is often the case that UASC require to be accommodated with little prior notification due to the urgency of the situation. It is therefore important to establish and consider a number of different models of care and support to ensure the offering is suitable and appropriate for each individual.

Support network and arrangements required for UASC

- 2.12 In addition to the accommodation models explored, each individual UASC has unique and wider support needs in addition to their accommodation needs depending on their age, nationality and other circumstances. The North Ayrshire multi-service officer UASC taskforce has significant collective strengths and experience in providing appropriate supports for vulnerable individuals and families resettling in North Ayrshire. This has been gained through the delivery of a range of previous and ongoing resettlement programmes. This support required can include:
- **School/college places** – UASC will likely be aged to attend school which will provide both social and educational support. There will be a requirement for appropriate additional resource by way of an English as an Additional Language teacher (EAL) to support any young people moving into the area.
 - **Interpreter** - The requirement for and availability of interpreters will vary dependent on languages spoken by UASC. The UASC who were settled in North Ayrshire in 2016 received English lessons via ESOL in schools. Arrangements for the provision of additional English classes for the

individuals can also be made as required to assist in understanding of their studies.

- **Additional social work/Administration staff** - Given the specific nature of the young people's life experience and trauma – from their own countries and in the journey to the UK – each UASC will have unique and specific individual needs and requirements. There is likely to be a requirement for specific support to assist in required visits to consult with lawyers, medical appointments and support required to build relationships in the community to help the young people integrate.
- **Access to intensive counselling support as required.**
- **Consideration will be given to the young people who wish continuing care** as the Council has a duty of care to support care experienced young people up to age 26. Continuing Care Legislation would also apply to UASC as they are deemed 'looked after and accommodated' and may require access to support until they are 26 years of age.
- **Inform Care Inspectorate** if/when young people are received into our care.

2.13 Despite the number of potential support models being identified and also despite a desire to support UASC over the past year, until now, North Ayrshire was not able to offer any placements as the pressure within our own systems in terms of spaces within our children's houses, tenancies, foster carers or supported carers was maximised.

2.14 However, during December 2021, an appropriate supported carer became available within North Ayrshire who was able to assist. Based on the urgency of the evolving situation and the availability of a supported carer, together with the backlog of young people awaiting transfers through the voluntary rota, arrangements were quickly made for one UASC to be placed in North Ayrshire with the available supported carer commencing January 2022. The Home Office confirmed the UASC arriving in North Ayrshire in January is a 17-year-old male from Iraq. Comprehensive support arrangements, as required, have quickly been mobilised to meet the needs of this young person.

2.15 It is hoped there will be the potential to take a further UASC within the next few months based on the anticipated availability of a further suitable supported carer. The support model for this young person, and any future UASC received into our care, will require planning on an individual basis to best meet their needs in addition to careful consideration of their age, religion, cultural needs, language and dietary requirements. It is intended that additional supported carer capacity will be created through the active recruitment plan in place.

UK Government mandated UASC support scheme and rota

2.16 As a result of the increasing arrivals of UASC in Kent, in December 2021 the UK Government announced it would be implementing a mandated rota for placing UASC. The mandated rota was deemed unavoidable due to the varying levels of support voluntarily being offered across the UK. There are currently over 350 UASC awaiting to be resettled from the south of England to various parts of the UK, some of whom are being accommodated in hotels.

2.17 Officers continue to liaise with COSLA to support the arrival of UASC in North Ayrshire.

It is understood UASC will be allocated to each UK area in 'cycles'. It is understood Scotland will be allocated 11 UASC per cycle. Each rota has a total of 650 UASC so will see around 8-10 cycles per rota. Once the first rota is completed it will begin again. Officers anticipate each rota will complete over approximately a 2-month period, but this will be determined by the number of arrivals. If Council's accommodated UASC voluntarily prior to the commencement of the mandated scheme, then this number will be deducted from their national mandated allocation. The mandated allocation of UASC to be accommodated in North Ayrshire could potentially be up to 8 UASC per year. This is heavily dependent however on the numbers arriving in Kent and also on how quickly UASC can be placed in local authorities UK wide.

2.18 Funding is available to Local Authorities to support UASC resettling in their area. The funding levels are detailed at para 4.1 which is intended to help local authorities accommodate and support vulnerable children arriving in Scotland under the revised National Transfer Scheme (NTS). It must be used to benefit UASC arriving in Scotland either as part of the voluntary NTS or through alternative routes of entry. Funds can be utilised by local authorities to cover costs including, but not limited to:

- Staffing - the hiring of new staff or the paying of overtime to existing staff;
- Translation services - covering any translation costs incurred;
- Estate upgrades - undertaking estate maintenance; and
- Practical support - appropriate clothing, travel fees, wellbeing excursions, education materials.

3. Proposals

3.1 It is proposed that Cabinet:

- a) notes the significant work undertaken in recent years to support a number of UASC and families resettling in North Ayrshire, and notes the escalating humanitarian crisis in Kent;
- b) notes and endorses the accommodation of one UASC in January 2022 placed with a supported carer in North Ayrshire and approves the accommodating of a further UASC when an appropriate supported carer becomes available;
- c) notes and agrees participation in the recently announced mandated rota set by the UK Government as part of the revised National Transfer Scheme (NTS) which will potentially see up to a further 6 UASC being accommodated within North Ayrshire in the first year;
- d) notes the support models which will be considered by the established officer task group to identify the most appropriate support for each future individual UASC within North Ayrshire based on their specific needs;
- e) notes the funding outlined within paragraph 4.1 which will be received to assist the delivery of appropriate UASC support;
- f) agrees to receive further updates as the humanitarian response continues.

4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

Financial

- 4.1 Additional funding for local authorities accommodating UASC arriving in Scotland is provided which is £11,000. This is a one-off payment from the Scottish Government. A payment of £143 per night will also be received from the Home Office for each UASC placed in North Ayrshire.

Human Resources

- 4.2 The recruitment of additional Supported Carers and social work staff will be carried out within Children, Families and Justice Services as appropriate to meet demand.

Legal

- 4.3 When an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child presents in a local authority area, and the local authority accommodates the child for 24 hours, they become looked after by that accommodating local authority which then has ongoing responsibilities to that young person under the relevant legislation, notably; the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, Children and Young People (Scotland) 2014 and The Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009.

Equality/Socio-economic

- 4.4 The proposals in this report were recently equality impact assessed.

Environmental and Sustainability

- 4.5 None.

Key Priorities

- 4.6 The supporting arrangements proposed to assist in the ongoing humanitarian crisis meet a number of principles outlined within the Council plan.

Community Wealth Building

- 4.7 None.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 Consultation has taken place with members of the UASC Taskforce from across a range of Council services, all of whom are supportive of the proposals.

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For further information please contact **Alison Sutherland, Head of Service**, on 01294 317727.

Background Papers

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Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children – Potential Support Models

North Ayrshire Council's officer task group has considered and identified the undernoted potential support models which could be utilised to support UASC depending on the specific needs of each individual.

Model 1: Foster Care/Adult Placement Service/ Throughcare/Aftercare Services

Key features

- Foster carers used to support UASCs under 16.
- Adult placement service for over 16.
- Agencies providing fostering or adult placement require registration with the Care Inspectorate.

There is currently no available capacity. A foster care recruitment campaign is underway with the hope that it may be an available option going forward.

Model 2: Children's Houses

Key features

- Care in a residential setting with high levels of 24/7 staffing.
- For young people under 16.
- Requires registration with the Care Inspectorate and careful recruitment and vetting procedures.

This model, whilst appropriate, cannot be utilised unless there is available space within our Children's Houses. Whilst adaptations were considered to potentially increase capacity/availability of rooms, this was not considered viable due to the impact on existing occupants. At the current time, all of 4 houses are at full capacity. The taskforce will continue to consider this a potential support option as and when spaces become available.

Model 3: Hub and Spoke Model / Satellite Flats

Key features

- Several clustered flats across the local authority are identified for the young people.
- Support staff are employed to visit the young people but are not based on site.
- Out of hours service provided either by the support staff or contracted out to ensure 24/7 cover for emergencies.
- Support workers provide general encouragement and support with practical, social and emotional matters in a flexible, person-centred holistic manner.
- Support is also offered to access health services and counselling if appropriate.

- Young people are supported to develop independent living skills with a view to moving on and preparation for their futures.
- Young people are sign-posted to local services such as gyms, colleges and transport and communal activities are organised to support forming social connections.
- This model is age-dependent on age of UASC.
- This model is also dependent on accommodation becoming available.

Model 4: Residential house for 16-17 year olds with onsite support

Key features

- A residential house made up of self-contained flats with onsite support which is staffed 24/7.
- Peer support and support provided by the voluntary sector agency who manage the house to progress towards independent living.
- Support workers provide general encouragement and support with practical, social and emotional matters in a flexible, person-centred holistic manner.
- They also support young people to access health services, other forms of support and counselling if appropriate.
- Young people are supported to develop independent living skills with a view to moving on and preparation for their futures.
- The support arrangements - Housing Support or Care at Home require registration with the Care Inspectorate. Good practice suggests there should be a separate occupancy agreement for the young person.

Careful consideration of each UASC situation will be required regarding the appropriateness of this model. Given the trauma experienced by individuals, it is likely individual UASC would be better placed with a family or supported carer.

Model 5: Supported Carer

Key features

- Preferred model due to levels of support that can be provided by a supported carer. This model ensures the young person lives in a welcoming and homely environment and has the opportunity to live in a family home.
- Supported carers typically accommodate older young people aged 16-18 years which is likely to suit the needs profile of UASC arriving in the UK.
- The supported carer model is dependent on carer availability – an active recruitment campaign for supported carers underway at the current time.