

CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE

20 February 2018

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children



Purpose of report

Surrey currently looks after the third highest number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) of any local authority in England. This paper seeks to outline the current position in relation to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children & Care Leavers (UASCL)¹, whilst recognising the increasing financial considerations attendant upon having such a large group of asylum seekers in the care of the county.

Introduction

1. Surrey looks after the third highest number of UASC of any local authority in England. At its peak, there were 158 in December 2015, and there are currently (as at 16/01/18) 116, and a rising figure of 228 Care Leavers in Surrey's care as children reach the age of 18. The challenge is to ensure children who have almost without exception experienced considerable trauma, are afforded the response that we want for children in our care, whilst recognising that some will be returned to their countries of origin as young adults.
2. In 2015 Ofsted concluded "work with Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young People is particularly strong" in Surrey. Since then we have continued to raise the standard of work in line with increasing expectations, particularly in relation to trafficking and modern slavery and refreshed statutory guidance. The backdrop to the excellent work that Surrey County Council does with this cohort of children, is a significant funding deficit. The funding formula in relation to central Government grants is complex and dependent on when the UASC arrived and their age. The range of grant per child is between £25,915 - £41,610 per annum. The average cost per UASC in Surrey is £51,329 per annum, resulting

¹ For the purposes of this paper, reference to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (0-17 years old) also incorporates refugees. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Care Leavers are young people who are care leavers and have leave to remain in the country, aged between 18 -25 years old.

in Surrey County Council's subsidy for UASC of nearly £4.5 million in 2016/17.

The national context

3. Nationally, the number of UASC continues to rise putting significant pressure on Local Authorities. The Government is currently carrying out a funding review which Surrey has taken part in, and this included a meeting with Home Office representatives in December 2017. As part of the review, it was announced on 16/01/18 that Local Authorities would be provided with an additional £20 million, to be shared between all Local Authorities currently supporting more than 10 Asylum Seeking Children. At this stage we do not know what this will mean for Surrey County Council in terms of financial recompense.
4. There are a number of recent and significant changes which will impact upon practice with UASC. Firstly the Immigration Act 2016 clarifies the primacy of immigration legislation in relation to young adults who also have care leaver status. Practice up to now has seen Local Authorities continue to provide care leaving services up until the point that a young person is deported having failed to establish a right to stay in the country. The Immigration Act directs that once all applications for leave to remain have been exhausted, the young person's primary status becomes that of a failed asylum seeker rather than a care leaver and therefore the responsibility is with the Home Office. This aspect of legislation has not yet become law and the Home Office are due to issue further guidance on this issue.
5. A further development is newly enacted legislation which now identifies a duty upon housing authorities to prioritise UAS Care Leavers, and grants a 'local connection' for those who have been in the care of a first tier authority (Surrey) in respect of any of its second tier authorities (Surrey's districts and boroughs). As our children have not been with us for long and are in any case normally placed outside of the county, it has been very difficult to establish a connection with a district or borough and therefore to house an Asylum Seeking Care Leaver. The new legislative direction provides the opportunity for Surrey UASCL to establish a connection to a district and borough and to have a much improved chance of being housed. The County Council is now working with the district and borough housing leads to establish a mechanism for the fair allocation of responsibilities for housing.

6. The new Children & Social Work Act 2017 (from April 2017) includes the provision for care leaving children (including UASCL) to have extended personal adviser support until the age of 25. This places additional resource burden on Local Authorities.

The current Surrey profile

7. The vast majority of UASC arrive in Surrey often in the back of a lorry, and discovered at either Clacket Lane or Cobham services on the M25. In addition to this source of UASC, Surrey has agreed to take 5 UASC per year as part of the National Transfer Scheme. In terms of country of origin, Surrey looks after a variety of nationalities with the highest numbers being Eritrean (29%), Afghan (16%), Iranian (13%) and Vietnamese (10%).
8. All Looked after Children have high levels of complex needs whether UK population or UASC. UASC are more likely to have significant physical and mental health needs. These are influenced by lack of access to basic healthcare in their home country, their experience of witnessing and experiencing traumatic events, and the duration and conditions experienced on their journey to the United Kingdom.
9. The most important health issues relate to communicable (infectious) diseases (e.g. Tuberculosis screening and vaccination); dental health; nutrition (e.g. anaemia; sexual and reproductive health; and mental health (e.g. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and sleep disorders). The lack of health history on arrival in Surrey adds a further layer of complexity for these children. UASC may have been victims of torture, trafficking, Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).
10. Surrey does not have discrete UASC teams but has specialist workers within Looked After Teams. In order to manage the increasing numbers of UASC who become Care Leavers, at the beginning of 2018 we launched a new UASCL Team. Surrey also has a specialist worker who provides mental health expertise and support through CAMHS Transformation funding. There is also a dedicated lead Teacher for UASC in the Virtual School, as well as a lead in Health.
11. As far as possible we seek to find a cultural match for children in their placements, leading historically to a higher rate of out of county foster placements and semi-independent providers. This

poses challenges in providing social work and personal adviser services, completing health assessments, as well as having additional financial implications as costs tend to be higher.

12. Over the last year we have been working hard to provide increased sufficiency in Surrey. In January 2017 Surrey launched its Welcome Centre at Guildford YMCA providing accommodation for up to 10 UASC to enable assessment and specialist support following arrival. This initiative has proved successful and we are exploring how we can increase the number of move-on beds so that more UASC can stay put if appropriate. In addition we have developed the safety net of a Reception Centre (one or two nights only) for the rare occasions that we get a large number of arrivals at one time so that there will always be capacity to provide safe emergency accommodation.
13. In December 2017, Surrey was awarded £118,000 through the Controlling Migration Fund, and this will be used to further develop local placements for UASC integrated in communities. This will include working with colleagues who are helping to increase our use of 'Host Families', volunteers who will take and support new arrivals out of hours for up to 24 hours.

Financial implications for Surrey

14. The Home Office provides grant payments for UASC & UASCL and these payments were increased for arrivals after 01/07/16. The table below shows the average annual costs and the Home Office grant payments:

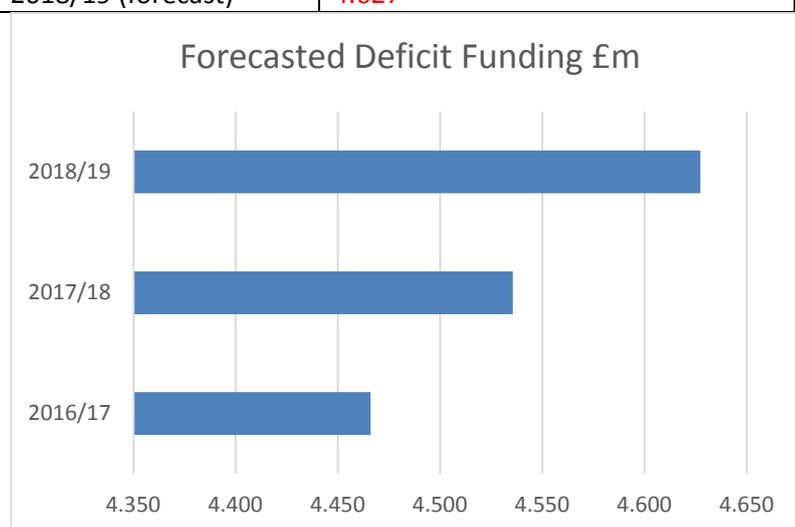
Age	Annual Direct Costs (primarily accommodation) 2015/16	Annual Indirect Unit Cost (Staffing)	TOTAL Unit Costs (2015/16)	Annual Legacy Grant Rates (before 01/07/16)	New Annual Grant Rates (Arrivals after 01/07/16)
U16	£38,835	£7,525	£46,360	-£34,675	-£41,610
16/17	£38,130	£7,525	£45,654	-£25,915	-£33,215
18+	£12,181	£3,714	£15,896	-£7,821	-£10,428

15. Unfortunately, the increased funding rates for UASC implemented in July 2016 by the Home Office makes no difference to the funding position for the Council's significant pre-existing UASC caseload. Of Surrey County Council's current caseload of UASC and UASC Care Leavers, the significant majority will continue to be reimbursed at the previous lower rates until they leave the Council's care – up to 2028. In addition, we are not reimbursed for

the first 25 UASC Care Leavers of this existing caseload, at a cost of £440,000 per year. This is patently an unfair system which penalises Surrey for its historically high caseload of UASC. It entrenches the unfunded costs (over £1million last year) for the long term.

16. The shortfall in funding has resulted in a deficit and net cost to Surrey:

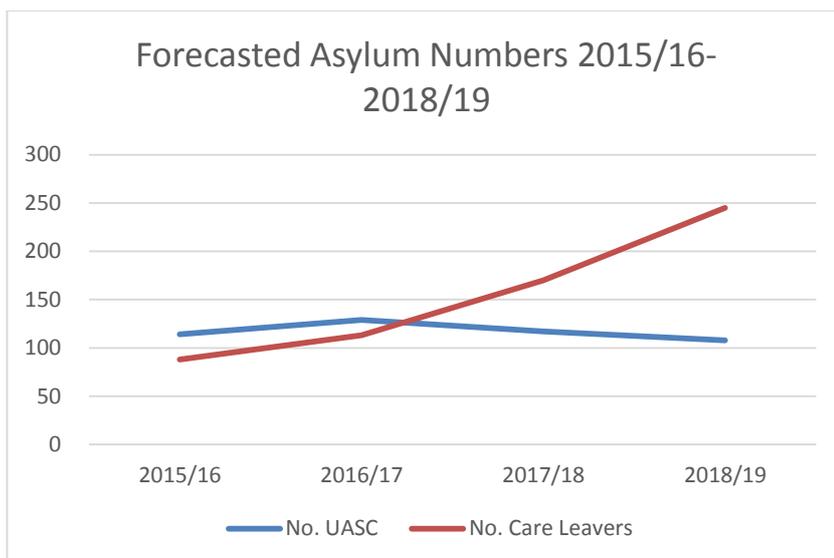
Year	Deficit Funding (£m)
2016/17	4.466
2017/18 (forecast)	4.536
2018/19 (forecast)	4.627



17. The current and expected trend is that the number of new arrivals is gradually falling, but there is a steady and ongoing increase in our cohort of UASCL as they become 18 years old.

**Forecasted Average Asylum Numbers
2015/16 - 2018/19**

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
No. UASC	114	129	117	108
No. Care Leavers	88	113	170	245



Conclusions

18. Surrey’s services to UASC and UASCL have always been well-regarded, and increased scrutiny and expectations of practice (particularly in respect of trafficking/modern slavery, health provision) means our services need to continue to develop. With the third highest number of UASC in the country, it is reasonable to expect a high standard and level of expertise in responding to the needs of unaccompanied children. Developing the Welcome Centre and associated plans to ensure appropriate move on within Surrey will be important to ensuring we can continue to meet these expectations. We will await the outcome of the Home Office Funding Review, findings which are due to be published in February 2018.

Recommendations

19. It is recommended that Children & Education Select Committee notes the contents of the paper, including the national context, legislative and policy requirement.
20. It is also recommended that Surrey County Council continue to lobby central Government for additional funding for UASC.
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