

County Council – 18 September 2020

Item 7(c) - Notice of Motion by Cllr Lord

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) - Briefing Note

Working with other authorities and the NTS

The National Transfer Scheme (NTS) was introduced in July 2016, the legislation (S72 Immigration Act 2016) allows for the Secretary of State to mandate the transfer of newly arrived children and young people. The South East region of local authorities have developed a system to facilitate voluntary engagement, and to avoid the possibility of the government mandating authorities' engagement. The South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM) are the co-ordinating body for the region and are responsible for developing operational instructions including the process of allocation, providing regional training and networking events, and a single point of access.

In February of this year, West Sussex Council reaffirmed its commitment to the agreement reached by the south-east Directors of Children's Services (in December 2017) to accept the transfer of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children from Kent and Portsmouth on a regional rota.

Since January 2020 West Sussex County Council have taken 8 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children from Kent. Whilst we will continue to take as many asylum-seeking children as we can, we are also mindful of the fact that we have our own formal port of entry (Gatwick) and, by dint of our geography, receive a number of children arriving by lorry. As such, we need to retain some capacity in the service to meet the needs of our own newly arriving unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

We have worked positively and proactively with colleagues through the SESPM and will continue to do.

The role of West Sussex County Council's Children's Services and foster carers

West Sussex County Council has a specialist team of social workers who support our unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The Child Asylum Team (CAT) is part of the Children Looked After Service.

West Sussex were in receipt of two years funding from the Controlling Migration Fund which was used to support the recruitment of an advanced practitioner social worker. This funding recently ended; however West Sussex have continued funding for this post until the end of June 2021. This social worker supports the recruitment of specialist foster carers and supported lodgings carers. As part of her role she develops training programmes and support groups to support foster carers and promote placement choice and stability. This social worker also raises knowledge and awareness of the profile of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children within children's services and across other agencies, including the voluntary sector.

There are currently 24 family-based care households (including Staying Put and Supported Lodgings) that are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children specific registered with West Sussex County Council. Of these 21 households have children placed with them.

West Sussex County Council continues to explore and develop innovation in the recruitment of foster carers (for all children, including those who are seeking asylum). We are very pleased to be supported in this work by current foster carers and by their faith-based communities.

West Sussex County Council is immensely proud of the work done by its social workers, other practitioners and foster carers in meeting the needs of these vulnerable children and is grateful for their commitment and passion.

Lucy Butler

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