

Update on the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) Team

Lead Officer:	Julie Skorupka – Strategic Manager for Children Looked After and Leaving Care
Author:	Julie Skorupka
Contact Details:	JSkorupka@somerset.gov.uk

1. Background and progress update

- As of 30 August 2017, Somerset County Council is responsible for 30 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children UASC. 14 of these children have arrived as part of the National Transfer scheme over the last year. The remaining 16 have travelled individually over a much longer period and are therefore outside the remit of the transfer scheme.
- Somerset prioritised the transfer of male UASC in their later teenage years as we could quickly access appropriate supported accommodation, which the Home Office advised would best suit these young men's needs.
- Somerset social workers have facilitated access to appropriate churches and mosques and culturally relevant food, with regular trips to Bristol to provide a wider cultural group.

2. Issues for consideration

- 50% of the UASC who have arrived individually, have arrived since June 2017, via south west ports as a result of displacement activity following the closure of the Calais camps. All have been young men, assessed as being over the age of 15.
- Most of the UASC have arrived in Somerset expecting to live in a large urban environment. They have, almost universally, not wanted to remain in Somerset, once they understood that they were not in or near a major city. For these young men, their ambition is to move to live in London or the West Midlands to be part of a larger, more international community with greater access to other people of a similar religion and culture.
- Access to education, support, appropriate churches and mosques and culturally relevant food has not helped these young men settle in Somerset or dampened their desire to move to other parts of the country.
- The inability to feel settled has, for some young men, affected their emotional health adversely. Alongside the trauma of their journeys to this country and the loss of their family, the need to live alongside their compatriots has become an increasing focus.
- For those young men, where we have been able to find family members or people of significance (such as godparents), in other parts of the country, and

supported the UASC to move nearer these people, their emotional health has quickly improved. To a lesser, but still significant extent, a move to living in a culturally varied and urban environment (mainly London or the West Midlands) has been positive for those young men who have chosen to do this, when they reach 18.

- These young men would be better served by a social work service, local to the area they now live in. However this is not within the parameters of the transfer scheme, so responsibility for these UASCs' welfare remains with Somerset Children's Social Care.

3. Recommendations and next steps

- Despite the best efforts of a dedicated social work team, to support the UASCs placed here, Somerset does not have the cultural diversity or large urban environments that UASC in the older teenage age group feel comfortable with.
- In consideration of a younger age group of UASC who may be able to settle better into a rural county, the authority has run fostering recruitment campaigns targeting carers for UASC in the last 12 months, but few, if any carers, have come forward to offer exclusively UASC placements. As there are currently insufficient foster placements for children already in the care of the council, it is not pragmatic to accept younger UASC at this time.

The Council is therefore considering and the Committee are asked to consider and comment on:

- Whether there are any other means of increasing the sufficiency of foster carers in the County with a view to considering whether foster placements can be offered to younger UASC.
- The suitability of a largely rural area, where the UASC we have so far received, from the Transfer Scheme, feel isolated from other young people from similar cultural backgrounds.