

<b>Report title</b>	Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) and Young People	
<b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b>	Councillor Beverley Momenabadi Children and Young People	
<b>Wards affected</b>	All wards	
<b>Accountable director</b>	Emma Bennett, Executive Director of Families	
<b>Originating service</b>	Children and Young People in Care	
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<b>Report has been considered by</b>	Children and Young People in Care Management Team Meeting	2 March 2022
	Children's Social Care Leadership Team Meeting	10 March 2022

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### Recommendations for decision:

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

1. Receive the update on Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) and Young People in Wolverhampton and the current support offer.
2. Receive a further update on UASC children and young people in six months' time for review.

### Recommendations for noting:

The Corporate Parenting Board is asked to note:

1. An increase in numbers of UASC currently accommodated in Wolverhampton and a greater package of support offered.

## 1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To provide an overview of the current position of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) and Young People in Wolverhampton and the support offered to this group of children and young people from April 2021 - March 2022.

## 2.0 Background

- 2.1 The National Transfer Scheme (NTS) was established in 2016 to establish a mechanism for the statutory responsibility for UASC to be transferred from an entry local authority to another authority in the UK to ensure fair distribution and relieve the pressures for the entry local authority. Since 2018 challenges occurred and there was a need for a new NTS rota which has been further established this year.
- 2.2 The rota was voluntary from July 2021, in which Wolverhampton were involved. This became a mandated rota in November 2021 due to the increase in UASC requiring accommodation. Since November, NTS became mandatory for all local authorities with an expectation that this would be temporary. We have now completed eight cycles of the voluntary NTS rota and phase one (cycles one-four) of the mandated scheme. We are currently on phase two (cycles five-eight) of the mandated scheme. It was anticipated when the rota began that there would be eight cycles over a two-year period with 650 young people between cycles one and four, and 650 young people between cycles five and eight, however five months into the rota and we already hit cycle eight with over 900 UASC transferring between local authorities.
- 2.3 Wolverhampton exceed the target to place UASC within ten working days from the date of referral and often place within five working days and as we have already taken a referral ahead of cycle five, we will no longer receive any more referrals for the rest of the cycles of phase two.

### Figure update:

- 2.4 On 31 March 2021, Wolverhampton supported a total of six UASC children in care and 27 UASC care leavers.
- 2.5 Since April 2021, Wolverhampton have supported a further 24 UASC in Wolverhampton. 16 were planned as part of the NTS rota and eight spontaneous arrivals.
- 2.6 Since April 2021, three UASC have become care leavers, one has returned to a hotel following an age-assessment and one care leaver has exited the service at 25.
- 2.7 As of March 2022, Wolverhampton are supporting 56 UASC. 27 are children in care and 29 UASC care leavers. This is increase in 23 UASC this year overall.
- 2.8 Of the 27 children and young people in care, six are turning 18 within the next six months.
- 2.9 Of the 29 Care Leavers, zero are turning 25 within the next six months so there will be an increase up to 35 UASC care leavers within six months.

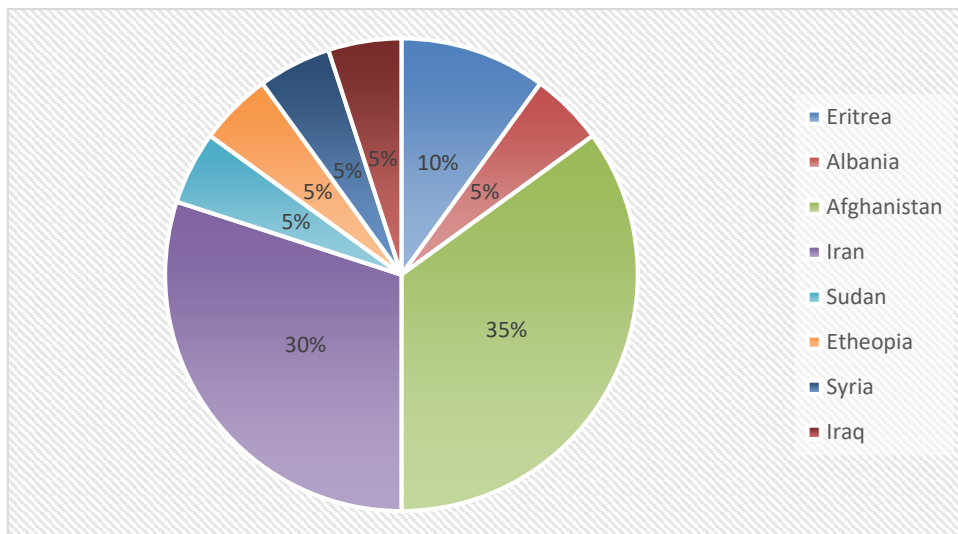
### **3.0 Progress**

#### **Age-disputes in hotels and spontaneous arrivals**

- 3.1 In September 2021, Wolverhampton had two spontaneous arrivals from a hotel procured by the Home Office for families claiming asylum. One young person was age-assessed as she disputed herself that she was a child after being placed into foster care. The young person was assessed as an adult and has since returned to the hotel willingly.
- 3.2 In November 2021 a third spontaneous UASC presented at the police station saying he is 16 and unaccompanied from Afghanistan. A fourth spontaneous arrival was picked up at the train station and a fifth spontaneous arrival who had travelled from Iran and was picked up by police
- 3.3 In December 2021, one young person presented to the Police station reporting they were a UASC and were accommodated.
- 3.4 In January, we accommodated two young people following a referral from SERCO, based within one of the hotels who were disputing the ages of the two young people placed into the hotel. SERCO were advised to request a copy of the age assessment completed by the Home Office in the first instance. This was completed and the two young people were re-referred to social care having assessed that their age assessments completed at the time of arrival were not Merton-compliant. They have since been accommodated by the Local Authority and placed into foster care.
- 3.5 Out of eight spontaneous arrival referrals since April, we have accommodated seven. One has returned to the hotel following an age assessment. With spontaneous arrivals or age-disputed young people in hotels, we rely on the Operation Innerste procedures between police and social care to ensure young people are not known to other local authorities or the police.
- 3.6 For the spontaneous arrivals we are unable to assess whether this is coincidence or linked to any other reason. Other local authorities have seen similar trends with Coventry and Solihull seeing a large increase in Afghanistan UASC presenting themselves as minors once they are placed into the area.

## Nationality

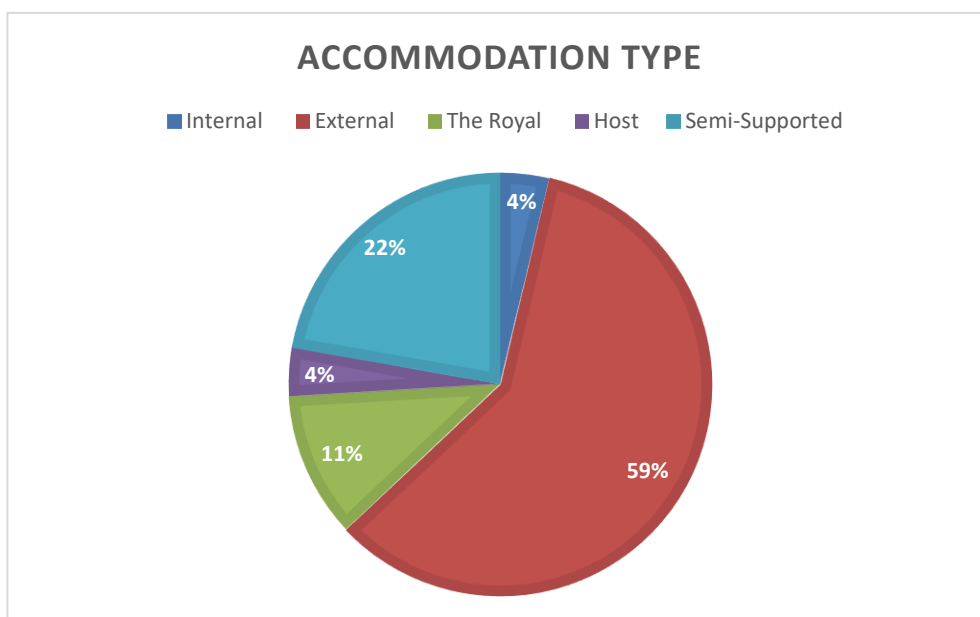
3.7 The diagram below shows the nationalities of our current children in care UASC cohort:



3.8 Many of our young people are from Afghanistan and Iran but there are eight separate countries of origin within our UASC community, this is considered when matching to placements and is driving forward the need for group activities between workers and the Refugee and Migrant Centre (RMC).

## Accommodation Type

3.9 The below diagram shows the placement types of our children in care UASC cohort. In summary:



- 59% of UASC are living with external foster carers.
- We have been successful in supporting UASC to live independently. All care leaver UASC live independently and seven young people in semi-supported (six in flats and one with a host).

- Three UASC boarding at the Royal Wolverhampton School.

## **4.0 The Needs of UASC**

### **Health**

- 4.1 Due to the increase in UASC, there has been an increase in Initial Health Assessments (IHA). The Gem Centre have now increased the appointment slots to two hours to allow for interpreters and the Local Authority support if interpreter availability is an issue. Our health colleagues in the Royal Wolverhampton NHS trust have created a bespoke package of support available for UASC. All UASC will now be allocated a named nurse on arrival. There is also a new document developed to support the Review Health Assessment (RHA) which focuses on vulnerabilities, health and emotional wellbeing. Following their RHA, UASC will be offered a follow up appointment two months later to meet their named nurse. They will receive a Sleep Pack (provided by the Separated Child charity which consists of lavender oils and aids to support sleep).
- 4.2 The named nurse will build a relationship in order to and review care plans to avoid drift in the health needs of UASC. Following an appointment with the named nurse, they will be invited to drop ins and will make another appointment two month after. It is recognised that UASC have a significant health need and we can now offer a bespoke service. Health colleagues will also sit on the UASC wellbeing panel from April 2022.

### **Education**

- 4.3 UASC are arriving with very limited English i.e., unable to write their own name and therefore are not eligible for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses as yet. There is a requirement for pre-ESOL work and Wolverhampton Local Authority have worked together with Wolverhampton College to provide a bespoke / additional pre-ESOL course for up to twelve young people. We have six of our UASC Not in Education, Employment or Training who have started the course in March 2022 and we are opening up to other Local Authorities. The Get Ahead Programme (GAP) is a twelve-week mainstream programme adapted for our UASC and will run five days a week during the summer term. Wolverhampton are keen to ensure the educational offer is sufficient and happy to lead on supporting other local authorities who have children placed within the region. By September, young people will be able to access ESOL and Level 1 provision dependant on their levels and location and will therefore be in Education, Employment and Training.

### **Placement suitability / availability**

- 4.4 Young people are arriving with little knowledge or skills around independent living and are requiring a great deal of support from the housing support team. Some young people are unable to leave their flats on their own and require a great deal of support to get about. This is being addressed with targeted work via the RMC for new arrivals and independence skills are being assessed at the ports.

4.5 We have also found it harder to find suitable accommodation in external fostering agencies of late where placements are becoming further afield with Coventry last week and Leicester put forward as the only other option. This is a concern where we did not previously have any issues placing UASC locally in external agencies well equipped and experienced to support UASC.

## **5.0 Support Services to UASC in Wolverhampton**

5.1 In addition to Barnardo's Anti-Trafficking Service, we have an excellent resource in the Refugee and Migrant Centre (RMC). This wellbeing project was funded up until March 2022 with plans to extend for financial year 2022-2023. This links the local authority, The Royal School, Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and the RMC.

5.2 The RMC provide invaluable support to our young people as a universal service but additionally have provided case work, mentoring, legal advice and support, ESOL courses, group work and support our UASC with everyday living, education, health and wellbeing and immigration advice and support. The Service Manager for Children and Young People in Care (CYPiC) and RMC are working on an action plan around targeted support to new arrivals in particular.

5.3 There is an Assistant Director of Children's Services Task and Finish Group which encourages regional authorities to support each other around the transfer and delivery of support to UASC in each area. The Service Manager for CYPiC attends this meeting monthly.

5.4 The Royal Wolverhampton School is a free school with additional boarding facilities and has worked with 13 UASC since 2015, having supported three UASC to transition to University. The Royal is a diverse and multi-racial school serving both the City of Wolverhampton and local areas and international countries of Romania, Baltic states, Hong Kong, Spain, Germany, Croatia, Bulgaria, and Nigeria. As such, pupils immediately find a sense of belonging and family, critical in their ethos and values. The RMC work in close partnership with the Royal school, so where possible, we try and place our young people at this school.

5.5 We have a monthly UASC Health and Wellbeing panel, chaired by CYPiC Service Manager and consists of the RMC, Senior social worker, CAMHS and more recently to include CYPiC named nurses. The panel reviews the health and wellbeing needs of all UASC.

5.6 We have developed a UASC training package for all social workers, delivered by our Advanced Practitioner. Four sessions have been delivered this year. Coram have also commissioned age assessment training and Wolverhampton social workers are routinely attending so we can increase our pool of social workers who are age-assessed trained. We regularly receive free UASC training via the West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership which is accessed by social workers.

5.7 We have a UASC champion who sits within the Reach leaving care team as a Young Person Advisor (YPA). We have also funded an additional YPA post from UASC funding and their role is to support with securing immigration status for our young people.

- 5.8 The Grand Mentor scheme extends to UASC.
- 5.9 To conclude, we ensure all social workers understand UASC and we remain committed to supporting the presenting immigration, health and wellbeing needs by reviewing service and subsequently requesting additional funding for the RMC to continue their services. Holistically we support our UASC utilising the roles and combined experience from the UASC Champion, Advanced Practitioner, the RMC, CAMHS and The Royal Wolverhampton School.
- 5.10 We continue to see an increasing demand to accommodate UASC over the last six months. Whilst we feel well equipped to deal with this in some areas due to the links established with relevant agencies, support from the Personalised Support Team (who identify our placement options), internal Supported Accommodation team, and The Royal Wolverhampton School. As we continue to see this increase, we need to further review capacity within the local authority. It is recognised that this is a national issue, and all other local authorities are experiencing the same, therefore the support offer is being considered widely by the NTS and Home Office.

## **6.0 Financial implications**

- 6.1 There are no financial implications for this paper.  
[JG/11032022/Y]

## **7.0 Legal implications**

- 7.1 Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 imposes a general duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need. Children seeking asylum (UASC) are children who arrive in the country with no responsible adult to care for them are separated or 'unaccompanied' and are therefore 'in need'. The relevant local authority children's service has a gateway duty to assess such children under section 17, and then, almost always, to accommodate them under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 and therefore child in care procedures apply.
- 7.2 There is also a requirement to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in accordance with section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship, and Immigration Act 2009.  
[SB/13032022/J]

## **8.0 Equalities implications**

- 8.1 UASC receive the same service as CYPiC, and we ensure the Local Authority and its partners meet children and young people's individual needs as a good parent would. Furthermore, the Nationality and Borders bill includes an equality impact assessment and the Local Authority take into consideration protected characteristics when supporting UASC with their language, religious and cultural needs.

## **9.0 All other Implications**

- 9.1 There are no other implications considered in this paper