

CORPORATE PARENTING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

19 OCTOBER 2021

National Transfer Scheme

Reasons for the Report

1. This report provides the Committee with information in relation to National Transfer Scheme. The National Transfer Scheme forms the basis of a voluntary agreement made between local authorities to ensure a more even distribution of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC). The report aims to inform the Committee of the scheme along with an update on the developments thus far in its implementation.

Background – National Transfer Scheme (NTS)

2. The National Transfer Scheme (NTS) is intended to ensure that any participating local authority (LA) does not face a disproportionate responsibility in accommodating and looking after unaccompanied children, simply by virtue of being the point of arrival.
3. Any local authority supporting UASC at, or above, 0.07% of their general child population is able to refer a child into the NTS for transfer to another local authority under the rota arrangement.
4. Each region or nation involved in the NTS takes its turn on the rota in sequence. The expectation will be for that region or nation to fulfil the allocated number of placements at which point responsibility will move on to the next region, and so on. The rota aims to work on a quarterly cycle and therefore Authorities are able to effectively plan accommodation and support in preparation for when we are next on the rota. (Note that the rota is currently moving at a faster pace due to current demand)
5. The long-term objective of the voluntary transfer scheme is to ensure that children can access the services they need by achieving a fairer distribution of

unaccompanied children across all local authorities and parts of the UK, through a scheme which is equitable and transparent.

6. The National Transfer Scheme launched nationally on 26th July 2021

Regional Pilot

7. In March 2021, lead officers in both Cardiff and Newport developed a proposal to scope a regional delivery model of the National Transfer Scheme in Wales. Both Cardiff and Newport have the expertise and experience of supporting unaccompanied children and have strong networks of partnership support that can be drawn on to offer holistic support for the children placed in our cities.
8. Following discussions with the All-Wales Heads of Children's Services, it was agreed that Cardiff and Newport would proceed with the scoping exercise for a regional model for the NTS. The NTS scoping exercise is being delivered alongside a detailed investigative project plan which explores opportunities to improve and streamline the service offer and complete relevant feasibility studies for regionalisation.
9. The pilot will be delivered over 18 month period, and produce recommendations for the future model, which will be provided to Cabinet for consideration.
10. The regional pilot is resourced through grant funding from the Welsh Local Government Association and Welsh Government and has enabled the recruitment of a Project Manager, supplementary financial assessments and the development of key service delivery and management tools, such as a service dashboard.
11. The long-term arrangements are pending agreement following the findings and recommendations of the pilot, however a regional rota would introduce a model through which Cardiff and Newport accept NTS placements proportionate to Wales's annual allocation of UASC transfers (30 UASC's per year). The region would therefore, provide the placements and support for any transfer requests on behalf of the other 20 Local Authorities in Wales.
12. There will be approximately 7-8 UASC placed in Wales each cycle and where possible this will be shared across Newport and Cardiff to reflect service capacity (until the total allocation of 30 has been reached).
13. Cardiff provides support to approximately 16 spontaneous arrivals per year. Any spontaneous arrivals of young people in Cardiff will continue to be supported in the Local Authority by the UASC service, and those children transferred via NTS will be in addition to spontaneous presentations.

14. The pilot seeks to understand the full implications of this model for Cardiff and Newport and produce a comprehensive vision for a child-centred and sustainable service for the NTS Rota in Wales through the regional model, building upon the existing strengths of the two authorities, who have extensive experience and expertise in this area.

Regional Pilot Project Developments

15. Excellent progress has been made to date following the recruitment of the Project Manager. Detailed scoping is being delivered in a number of key areas including:

- Planning sufficient and appropriate accommodation options ensuring that the right level of support is in place.
- Delivering the launch of a specialist age-assessment centre at Colum Road Centre, which is due to become operational December 2021. The project will also investigate and support the implementation of a multi-disciplinary approach at this site, collaborating with key public and voluntary sector partners.
- Working with advocacy services to ensure we keep children's rights at the heart of all developments and that the child's voice is reflected in decision making. This includes incorporating the use of the Mind of My own app for the cohort, to better capture the views and experiences of children supported by the service.
- Developing pre and post-16 education provision to meet the needs including ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) support.
- Developing and cascading training to staff and partners and to raise awareness of the UASC Service in Cardiff and Newport to key internal and external stakeholders.
- Ongoing evaluation of the NTS pilot scheme drawing on key data and feedback from children, practitioners and partners to evaluate the impact.

Issues

16. There continue to be large numbers of arrivals at the port in Kent. Kent Children's Services were unable to accept any unaccompanied minors into their care for several months during the summer, as the demand on their service was so great that they would be unable to meet their statutory duties to safeguard these young people. Therefore, many children who arrived at the port in Kent in recent months are currently being supported by the Home Office.

17. This situation has impacted the speed of the implementation of the transfers across the UK and the Home Office has sought to accelerate the

placement of these children in other local authorities across the UK. This has been outside the scope of the BAU rota arrangements outlined above.

18. Through this process, Cardiff and Newport have provided a number of emergency placements for children and 13 children have been placed across the two authorities to date. Given the critical circumstances in Kent, other Welsh local authorities have also provided emergency placements over the summer,

Financial Implications

19. With support from the Council's accountancy function, a full financial assessment will be completed through the regional pilot to ensure that future participation in the NTS rota on a regional basis is sustainable and will contribute to an efficient and high quality UASC service for all children who access this support.
20. Whilst, Current financial assessments indicate that participation in the scheme will be cost neutral this position will be regularly reviewed through the use of information detailing current numbers and projected demand. Where financial pressures arise then actions will be taken to resolve without impact on the service.

Legal Implications

21. There are no legal implications arising from the Local Authority's involvement in the Regional Pilot.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is recommended to:

- a) Consider the report and identify how the committee would like to monitor progress in the NTS pilot.
- b) Note the information provided regarding Cardiff's involvement in the NTS scheme to date.

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28th September 2021