

## SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING & ALL-MEMBER MEETING



Date: 30 June 2016

Subject: **AOB: Transfer of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, Cllr Paul Watkins, Chair South East Strategic Partnership for Migration**

### Recommendations:

- i) Support voluntary transfer of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) to South East local authorities and identify numbers that can be accepted.
- ii) Endorse a letter to Ministers asking for more clarity on funding for councils accepting UASC.

### 1. Background

- 1.1 Ministers are working with local authorities, the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM) and SEEC to agree a voluntary approach to sharing Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) more equally across the UK. If a voluntary approach fails Ministers have powers to force councils to accept UASC.
- 1.2 Currently Kent CC has around 900 UASC, equivalent to roughly one third of all 2015 arrivals. At a workshop for South East authorities on 16 June, the Home Office explained the need for volunteer councils to reduce the burden on Kent and to help meet the Government's Immigration Bill commitment to accept some UASC already in Europe.
- 1.3 South East county and unitary councils – along with councils in other parts of the country – are being asked to indicate how many UASC they could accept. No authority will be expected to take more than 0.07% of their existing child population.
- 1.4 While many local authorities are willing to help in principle – subject to political approval – a number of policy and funding questions remain unanswered. SEEC and SESPM plan to write to Refugee Minister Richard Harrington to press Government to provide clarity on the issues below. If you have other points to raise please email [Heather Bolton](#) or [Roy Millard](#) by 4 July.
- 1.5 Following the 16 June workshop, discussions are underway to secure Home Office funding for a co-ordinator to collate transfer offers from South East local authorities and help share good practice. If funded, the post is likely to be hosted by SESPM and SEEC.

### 2. Draft points for Ministerial letter

- 2.1 Government's decision to fund costs of all UASC from 1 July is welcome. Previously funding was only available for councils with 25 or more UASC. However:
  - 2.1.1 **Many UASC are aged 16-17: Clarity is needed on their future support as 18+ care leavers.**
    - a) Current funding does not cover the cost of supporting care leavers. This shortfall must be addressed. The definition of 'education' needs to be clarified, along with councils' role in funding vocational courses.
    - b) How can councils and Home Office streamline asylum eligibility assessments when UASC reach 18? There is a need to remove duplication, ensure consistent messages to young people and avoid the situation where councils continue to support failed asylum seekers without government funding.
    - c) Greater clarity is needed on how Government will ensure failed asylum seekers who are Appeal Rights Exhausted leave the country swiftly.
    - d) Councils would welcome Government advice on the most reliable way to check young people's ages. Some claim to be younger than their real age in order to access support.
    - e) Effective Government communication is needed to inform communities about UASC. Public expectations are for younger children rather than 16-17 year olds.
  - 2.1.2 **Shortage of services: Councils need help to meet high costs, driven up by demand.**
    - a) Councils need funding to recruit and train more foster carers. At present demand exceeds availability. This is pushing the costs of external agency foster carers out of councils' reach.
    - b) National-level action is needed to ensure supported accommodation for older UASC is available. At present accommodation is only provided in a few locations, forcing some councils to place UASC outside their boundaries.
    - c) Increased demand for interpreters, English classes and health assessments is pushing up prices beyond councils' ability to pay. How could sharing of services with Government departments help achieve economies of scale?
  - 2.1.3 **Ministers must recognise councils' need for funding to increase capacity.**
    - a) Some councils could face 50% increases in their numbers of children in care if they sign up to the UASC scheme. Funding is needed to help them expand and restructure their staffing to respond to such a significant increase in demand.