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Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP
Minister of State for Immigration
Home Office
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30 January 2018

UASC FUNDING REVIEW

Dear Caroline

We want to offer congratulations on your appointment as Immigration Minister and assure you that, as South East councillors, we will be delighted to work with you to help shape effective migration policies.

Of particular interest is the long running review that you have inherited around funding for local authorities who support Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). As your officials continue to review this, we want to reinforce some of the challenges in the South East that make it difficult to place UASC via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). We are also keen to find a resolution following the agreement with President Macron that the UK will now accept additional UASC from Europe.

Central funding for local authorities who accept UASC fails to cover the costs incurred by councils in accepting placements. Councils need to subsidise UASC costs from local budgets and this forces them to make difficult decisions about reducing local services to be able to support unaccompanied children.

Our primary request is therefore that you make sure the funding review commits to reimbursing councils for the full costs of supporting UASC. We welcome UASC funding included in December's local government settlement and this month's Controlling Migration Fund allocations, but do not believe they will bridge councils' shortfalls.

Linked to funding shortfalls are growing concerns about current inequities in UASC placements, which we have heard from several colleagues across the South East. In some respects a voluntary NTS is welcome as it avoids top down imposition on local authorities. However, while UASC funding for councils remains inadequate, it is inevitable that some councils will be reluctant to take their place in a rota system for allocating UASC equitably across the South East.

We see funding as vital to redressing this problem and encourage you to redesign the UASC programme to mirror the successful voluntary – and better funded – system in place for councils who resettle refugees. Better recognition of council costs in the refugee programme has allowed South East councils to respond very positively and we are due to reach the milestone of 1,000 refugees resettled across the South East by March 2018.

Funding challenges illustrated

Survey data from a number of South East authorities illustrate some of our councils' funding deficits. For example accommodation is costing an average £36,800 a year per UASC due to a shortage of more cost-effective in-house foster care places. This accommodation cost alone is over £3,000 more than the standard £91 a day for councils supporting a UASC aged 16-17.

The survey also shows councils' additional costs including social work staff (average £7,400 pa in the councils that responded), education (average £2,500 pa), plus health interventions, interpreter/advocacy costs and asylum/ legal costs.

Specific examples from three of our largest councils – Kent, Hampshire and Surrey – provide more detail on the scale of the shortfall faced by individual authorities:

- **Kent County Council:** In 2017-18, Kent estimates a shortfall of £4.6million against the costs of supporting UASC aged under 18, former UASC who are now care leavers and the costs of operating its Millbank reception and assessment centre for UASC.
- **Hampshire County Council:** In 2017-18, Hampshire estimates a shortfall of £1.96m against the costs of supporting UASC aged under 18.
- **Surrey County Council:** In 2016-17, Surrey saw a shortfall of £4m against the costs of supporting UASC and former UASC who became care leavers.

Many UASC arrive aged 16-17, which means that within a short period of time they face reassessment. Government's £200 per week for UASC care leavers has improved councils' financial situation slightly but it does not address funding shortfalls. In addition, current rules prevent councils claiming funding for all UASC care leavers. For example, Hampshire can currently only claim for 15 out of 70 UASC care leavers, giving a £395,000 shortfall on accommodation and personal allowances alone because:

- A threshold means the first 25 are automatically excluded from funding allocations
- 20 are unfunded because they are appeals rights exhausted or have not been with the authority for at least 13 weeks – but if councils halt support the young people may become homeless
- A further 10 are under review because their date of birth has been queried or because they do not have identification paperwork.

Solutions

We welcome Government's commitment to help train a further 1,000 foster carers and support workers nationally, share good practice and raise awareness of the fostering and care needs of UASC. This is all useful but the proposed approach will place local authorities in an invidious position as they seem to be required to pledge NTS places before knowing whether they will be allocated any training resource or whether it will be sufficient.

November's Government Safeguarding Strategy is also welcome, however, it does not provide the structural change in funding that local authorities need to be able to participate fully in the NTS.

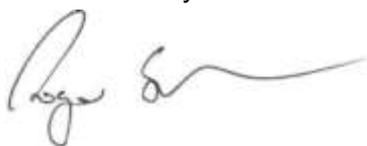
For local authorities the critical first stage of a solution will be to secure full reimbursement of the costs of supporting UASC, so we urge you to include this as a guiding principle in the UASC funding review.

We also propose Home Office rules for funding UASC care leavers are updated to:

- Remove the minimum threshold and 13 week qualification period, so councils receive funding for all UASC aged 18+ that they support
- Ensure councils are refunded the costs of caring for young people while their eligibility is assessed
- Cover basic council costs for appeals rights exhausted UASC to help prevent homelessness
- Increase funding for UASC 18+ to cover all costs incurred by councils.

These changes would mean that councils could afford to accept NTS placements and offer the ongoing help and support that UASC need to become integrated into society or return to their home country. We look forward to hearing how Government plans to approach these challenges and would be happy to meet you to discuss the issues in more detail.

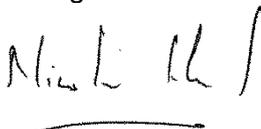
Yours sincerely



Cllr Roger Gough
Chairman South East Strategic Partnership
for Migration and Cabinet, Kent County Council



Cllr John Furey
South East England Councils Executive Member
and Deputy Leader Surrey County Council



Cllr Nicolas Heslop
Chairman South East England Councils and
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