

CYPE Scrutiny Commission

Children and Young People
from Abroad Seeking Safety

CYPE Scrutiny Commission: 14 January 2025

Lead director: Laurence Jones

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All.
- Report author: David Thrussell, Head of Service, Corporate Parenting
- Author contact details: 0116 454 1657
- Report version number: v3.

1. Summary

- 1.1. This report provides an overview of children and young people who come to Leicester having arrived from abroad seeking safety, often referred to technically as “Unaccompanied Asylum- Seeking Children”. The report relates specifically to children and young people who are looked after by the council or are eligible for support as care leavers and does not reference all new arrival families entering the city who do not receive support from social care.
- 1.2. The council has continued to meet its obligations in respect of children and young people seeking safety. This has had an impact on resource allocation across children and young people’s and education services and housing together with our statutory partners including health services. These additional pressures continue to be monitored and are part of the regional and national dialogue with the Home Office and the Department for Education.

2. Recommended actions/decision

- 2.1 The Children Young People and Education Scrutiny Commission are asked to note the information in the report.

3. Detailed report

- 3.1 Leicester City currently supports 46 Children Seeking Safety who arrived unaccompanied from abroad and are eligible for support as Children Looked After. This represents a small proportion of the 608 children and young people who are currently looked after and is an increase of 6 additional looked after children since the last report to CYPE Scrutiny in June 2024.
- 3.2 As Children Looked After the Local Authority has the same duties as Corporate Parents to ensure these children’s social care, health and

education needs are met until their eighteenth birthday when they become eligible for further assistance and support as adult care leavers up to age 25.

- 3.3 Most children and young people coming to the city seeking safety are older adolescents. The largest group of young people who are being supported are aged 18, although the ages range from 15-24 years. The Local Authority Leaving Care Teams currently supports 61 young adults aged 18-25, who arrived unaccompanied from abroad and were subsequently looked after. This represents a small increase in the total number of 304 Care Leavers currently being supported.
- 3.4 The numbers of children seeking safety are impacted by seasonal factors with higher numbers in summer months. There is an annual trend in children becoming eligible care leavers from 01 January each year where age assessments are required, and children seeking safety having arrived from abroad are provided with a designated date of birth as 01 January.
- 3.5 The overwhelming majority of children seeking safety are male with the Children Looked After Service currently only supporting one female child and the leaving care team three adult women. Whilst children and young people seeking safety come from a diverse range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, the largest single group are from Afghan heritage, followed by Iranian and Syrian ethnicity with predominantly Kurdish heritage.
- 3.6 There are three main pathways for Children Seeking Safety. Most children and young people are identified and transferred to Leicester as part of a National Transfer Scheme overseen by the Home Office. The scheme is based on a formula of 0.1% of the total child population of the city. The National Transfer Scheme was set up following increased number of arrivals of children and young people at ports, and the surrounding authorities unable to manage the numbers. To share the responsibility for these children across the UK the National Transfer Scheme was implemented by the Home Office. 100 children have transferred to Leicester on this scheme to date.

- 3.7 Ten young people are either spontaneous arrivals outside of the national transfer scheme or transfer from Home Office supported hotels when they identify as children seeking safety since July 2024. There have been 18 spontaneous arrivals since 01 June requiring age assessments.
- 3.8 As the age profile of children and young people seeking safety is mainly over 18 years, most of the young people being supported live in semi-independent accommodation in the community, with a smaller number of young people living in foster care or children's residential homes. These arrangements are subject to the same safeguarding and quality assurance systems that are in place for all children looked after and care leavers. This includes regular care plan and pathway plan reviews by a named social worker or leaving care advisor, visiting arrangements, tailored support agreed with the young person, and access to advocacy support.
- 3.9 Children and young people who are seeking safety are supported with integration into their local communities in accordance with their religious and cultural preferences. This may include support offered by churches, mosques, and temples together with services offered by local voluntary and community groups such as the Centre Project that provides a dedicated youth space and with advice and support for young people seeking safety.
- 3.10 Children who are seeking safety and who are looked after are supported by the Virtual School Team to integrate into local schools and are provided with a range of curricular and extra-curricular activities that are provided to all our children looked after. Our Virtual School also work with a range of organisations to provide additional post curricular enrichment activities.
- 3.11 The Virtual School have worked with partners in the authority to address the increasing need for English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) provision for our young people seeking safety. As our training providers and colleges are often full or do not take midway through the year, a new project will be launched in January to extend our ESOL offer as part of the DfE grant funded Staying Close and Connected programme for care leavers. The Adult

Education Centre have provided ESOL teachers to support our young people to access the course and to provide enrichment activities that will help to prepare them for life in Leicester and beyond.

- 3.12 The Educational Psychology Service Emotional Well-being in Education (EWE) project provides support and interventions for children in care including children and young people from abroad seeking safety in Leicester. The Creative Journeys intervention aims to provide a safe space for unaccompanied children to recognise their strengths and create safe pathways for the future as they plan for adulthood. Art, music (Taiko drumming) and the young people's individual interests are used creatively to support language, communication, and emotional expression. This project is in collaboration with Bull Frog Arts.
- 3.13 Young people who are seeking safety and are eligible for support as care leavers are provided with careers advice from our Information Advice and Guidance Service for support with employment, and training.
- 3.14 Children seeking safety who come to Leicester having arrived from abroad may have experienced trauma and have complex unmet health needs. As with all children looked after, children seeking safety will be provided with an initial health assessment by a designated health professional to identify their health needs which will inform their care plan. Children who arrive from abroad will be provided with translators and interpreters to attend health clinics and be referred to specialist health services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services where appropriate.
- 3.15 Adult arrivals who are seeking safety and then claim to be under the age of 18 years following their arrival are subject to age assessments. This requires additional professional social worker and independent support and interpreter services and may result in a young person either becoming looked after or ceasing to be looked after and not eligible for further support.

- 3.16 Seven age assessments have been completed by the Looked After Children's Team since January 2024 on children and young people received under the National Transfer Scheme. Four of these led to the outcome of the young person being over 18 years old. There are currently two legal challenges on-going and not fully settled. Three age assessments led to the young person's age being accepted as under 18, with a further two in progress and four awaiting commencements.
- 3.17 Adults who have not had their age assessment verified and who subsequently have their asylum claim declined can either make their way to the originating country independently or can join a Home Office scheme to return them home. They have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) other than specific Home Office grants.
- 3.18 The Local Authority are actively involved in regional arrangements with the Department for Education to identify and support children seeking safety. Liaison also occurs at a national level with the Home Office in respect of individual children and young people and the National Transfer Scheme.
- 3.19 The Rights and Participation Service has identified the voice of Children and Young People from Abroad seeking safety as a priority in 2025/6. A mapping exercise has been undertaken to promote access to advocacy services and there are two designated places for children and young people from abroad on the Young Peoples Council. The team has also worked to ensure that access to support services is available to all eligible looked after children and care leavers in a range of languages.
- 3.20 A Regional Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) Pilot was launched on 02 December supported by East Midlands Councils to identify local foster carers for Children and Young people from Abroad Seeking Safety. Once identified, the carers will be offered to Local Authorities including Leicester, for young people allocated to them through the National Transfer Scheme.

3.21 Childrens Social Care and Education will continue to work collaboratively across the council and with strategic partners to ensure that support can be planned, and services integrated for children seeking safety who come to Leicester having arrived from abroad.

4. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

4.1. Financial implications

The Home Office provides funding to local authorities in respect to their costs of supporting unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC). This is on a case-by-case basis. The projected claim for 2024/25 is expected to the £2 million for 63 cases.

Signed: Mohammed Irfan – Head of Finance

Dated: 02 January 2025

4.2. Legal implications

The report notes the legal obligations in respect of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and how the authority is fulfilling these statutory duties. There are no legal implications flowing from the report.

Signed: Susan Holmes

Dated: 24th December 2024

4.3. Equalities implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which requires us to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic as defined by the Equality Act 2010 (sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, disability, race, religion or belief, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, age) and those who do not.

In keeping with our PSED, we are required to pay due regard to any negative impacts on people with protected characteristics arising from our decisions (and this would include decisions on how we deliver our services) and put in place mitigating actions to reduce or remove those negative impacts.

The report provides an update on the working being undertaken across services in relation to Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children who are looked after by the council or care leavers eligible for support. This group of children are particularly vulnerable and face unique challenges. Protected characteristics of children and young people have been taken into account when providing services for them, for example, age, race, religion or belief, sex and collaborating with statutory partners and voluntary and community groups can enhance the provision of holistic support and help them to integrate into society.

Signed: Sukhi Biring, Equalities Officer

Dated: 24 December 2024

4.4. Climate Emergency implications

There are no significant climate emergency implications directly associated with this report.

Signed: Aidan Davis, Sustainability Officer, Ext 37 2284

Dated: 2nd January 2025

4.5. **Other implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)**

None

5. Background information and other papers:

- 5.1 This report is accompanied by a presentation on the support services and local offer to children and young people seeking safety.

6. Summary of appendices:

Appendix One & Two Anonymised Case Studies.

7. Is this a private report (If so, please indicate the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?

No

8. Is this a “key decision”? If so, why?

N/A