

CYPE Scrutiny Commission

Children and Young People
from Abroad Seeking Safety

CYPE Scrutiny Commission: 28 October 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 update on 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 supported as care leavers and does not reference all new arrival families entering the city who do not receive support from children’s social care, or children from abroad seeking safety who are placed in Leicester by other Local Authorities or who as young adults over 18 years move to Leicester.

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 52 Children Seeking Safety who arrived unaccompanied from abroad and are eligible for support as Children Looked After (01 October 2025). This represents a small proportion of the 608 children and young people who are currently looked after by the council and is an increase of 6 additional looked after children since the last report to CYPE Scrutiny in January 2025. Of these 52 Children Seeking Safety currently looked after, 3 young people were spontaneous arrivals to the city, 13 from Home Office supported hotels when they identified as children seeking safety, and 36 have arrived via the National Transfer Scheme.
- 3.2 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. The initial allocation of children to come to Leicester was based on the population of children already in Leicester and totalled 59. The Home Office have recently re-calculated this and increased this across the UK, and we will now be allocated 87 children. We anticipate that as we get close to our cap of 87 young people and other Local Authorities get close to their caps that the Home Office will increase the allocations again nationally.

- 3.3 As Children Looked After the Local Authority has a duty 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.
- 3.4 Most children and young people coming to the city seeking safety remain older adolescents. The largest group of young people who are being supported are aged 17 although the ages range from 15-24 years. The Leaving Care Team currently supports 69 young adults aged 18-25, who arrived unaccompanied from abroad and became eligible for care leaver services. This represents a small increase in the total number of 477 Care Leavers currently being supported.
- 3.5 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, as children seeking safety from abroad with an undetermined age are provided with a designated date of birth as 01 January.
- 3.6 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 time, 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. Additional social work staffing capacity in children's social care has been agreed this year to support this process.

- 3.7 The Looked After Children's Team have completed three full age assessments in 2025, two of which concluded with accepting the claimed age, and one concluded that the individual was an adult. Two legal challenges concluded in 2025, and one continues from 2024.
- 3.8 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. Migrant Help assist those leaving Home Office accommodation regardless of their determination decision.
- 3.9 The overwhelming majority of children seeking safety are male with the Children Looked After Service currently supporting only one female child and the leaving care team two adult young women. 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 Sudanese heritage, and a significant number with Kurdish heritage.
- 3.10 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.

- 3.11 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 with advice and support for young people seeking safety.
- 3.12 Children who are seeking safety and who are looked after by the council are supported by our 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 work with a range of organisations to provide additional post curricular enrichment activities.
- 3.13 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 local training providers and colleges are often full or do not admit midway through the year, a new project was launched in January 2025, 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. We have been able to secure this funding for an additional academic year through Staying Close, Staying Connected. The previous cohort of 17 students have all secured places at Leicester College, supported by their allocated Post 16 Officer.
- 3.14 The Educational Psychology Service Emotional Well-being in Education (EWE) project supports interventions for children in care including children and young people from abroad seeking safety in Leicester. Partners at Bullfrog Arts support the 'Journeys' programme that works alongside young people. 'Journeys' explores and connects our Children Seeking Safety with their country of birth and with the other young people who have also sought safety here in Leicester.

- 3.15 The Virtual School Educational Psychologist provides consultation, assessment, advice and support for children in care including children and young people from abroad seeking safety in Leicester. Working with the ESOL provision at the Adult Education Centre, the educational psychology service is providing a further 10-week intervention in the Spring Term.
- 3.16 Young people who are seeking safety and are eligible for support will be provided with careers advice from our Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) Service. The service is part of the team of professionals who are notified as soon as a young person is placed in Leicester and will work with the individual and colleagues to find the appropriate education or training provision. Careers advice will continue to be provided to the young person once they are in education or training, and an IAG adviser is part of the Personal Education Plan process.
- 3.17 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.
- 3.18 A Regional Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) Pilot was launched in December 2024 supported by East Midlands Councils to identify local foster carers for Children and Young people from Abroad Seeking Safety. The scheme offers training for any carers who are new to caring or are going through the recruitment process, or for approved carers who may be interested in caring for Children and Young people from Abroad Seeking Safety. Once enrolled, carers will have access to the training for 12-months so that they can re-visit the information contained within the modules to refresh their knowledge at any point in that time.

3.19 The Children's Rights and Participation Service have identified the need to ensure the views, feelings and wishes of children and young people from abroad seeking safety must be a priority. The Service recognises that children and young people seeking safety are a marginalised community and face significant barriers to participation. This could prohibit them from accessing support from children's rights and advocacy officers, and/or accessing groups such as the children in care council or the care experiences consultants (care leavers). To overcome these barriers, the Service has established an offer for children seeking safety. The offer provides monthly sessions at a community space or youth centre in the City to offer a safe, inclusive space to build social networks, understand their rights and share their experiences. Nine children and young people seeking safety from abroad attended the first session. The Service will continue to recruit to this group and ensure that this cohort of children are given their space, voice, audience and most importantly some influence over decisions that are made about their lives.

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

4.1. Financial implications

4.1.1 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 2025/26 is expected to be £2.4 million for 60 cases.

Signed: Mohammed Irfan, Head of Finance

Dated: 13 October 2025

4.2. Legal implications

4.2.1 This report is for information purposes only, as such there are no direct legal implications as a result of the report. In terms of statutory duties however, it should be noted:

Sections 17, 20, and 22 of the Children Act 1989 place clear duties on the Local Authority to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need and those looked after by the LA. The report references 52 looked-after UASC and 69 care leavers, meaning the council has corporate parenting responsibilities under s.22 and must ensure care, health, and educational needs are met. Failure to provide appropriate accommodation, support, or protection could expose the council to Judicial Review and/or Human Rights Act challenges.

4.2.2 Age assessments are a significant legal risk area and numerous assessments have been challenged; the LA must ensure robust procedure, record-keeping, and adherence to the Home Office and ADCS Age Assessment Guidance (2023) and relevant case law.

4.2.3 UASC are a highly vulnerable cohort. Under Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) and Section 47 duties, the council must ensure proper identification and response to safeguarding concerns (e.g., trafficking, missing episodes) and coordination with police, health, and voluntary sector partners.

4.2.4 Under the Modern Slavery Act 2015 the LA have a duty to notify the Home Office if they encounter a potential victim of modern slavery. This duty, which applies in England and Wales, typically involves making a referral into the NRM for a child.

Signed: Amy Owen-Davis, Principal Solicitor, Social Care and Safeguarding,
Legal Services

Dated: 17 October 2025

4.3. **Equalities implications**

4.3.1 The Council must comply with the public sector equality duty (PSED) (Equality Act 2010) by paying due regard, when carrying out their functions, to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a 'protected characteristic' and

those who do not. Protected characteristics under the public sector equality duty are age, disability, gender re-assignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

- 4.3.2 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.
- 4.3.3 This report provides an update on the work being carried out across services that support Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children who are in the care of the council or are care leavers eligible for assistance. These children are especially vulnerable and face distinct challenges.
- 4.3.4 When delivering services, the protected characteristics of children and young people, such as age, race, religion or belief and sex have been considered. Collaboration with statutory partners, as well as voluntary and community organisations/group, plays a vital role in offering holistic support and assisting these young people in integrating into society.

Signed: Sukhi Biring, Equalities Officer

Dated: 9 October 2025

4.4. **Climate Emergency implications**

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

Signed: Phil Ball, Sustainability Officer, Ext 372246

Dated: 10 October 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:**

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