

CYPE Scrutiny Commission

**Children and Young People
from Abroad Seeking Safety**

**Children, Young People and Education
Scrutiny Commission: 27 October 2026**

Lead director: Laurence Jones

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All.
- Report author: David Thrussell, Head of Service, Permanence & Placements
- Author contact details: 0116 454 1657
- Report version number: v1

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”.

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 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 other two routes are unplanned spontaneous arrivals, and migrants who are settled by the Home Office in hotels and subsequently present as young people requiring an age assessment to determine if they are under 18 years of age.
- 3.2 Leicester City currently supports 49 Children from Abroad Seeking Safety who arrived unaccompanied and are eligible for support as Children Looked After (01 October 2026). This represents a small proportion of the 664 children and young people who are currently looked after by the council.
- 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 The report relates specifically to children and young people who are looked after by the council or supported as eligible 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 care experienced young adults over 18 years moved to Leicester.
- 3.5 Most children and young people coming to the city seeking safety are young adults aged 18-23 years being supported by the Leaving Care Team, with the highest number aged 20. The Leaving Care Team currently supports 93 young adults aged 18-23 who arrived unaccompanied from abroad as children and are eligible for support as adult care leavers.
- 3.6 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.
- 3.7 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.
- 3.8 The Children's Assessment Support & Prevention Service (CASP) have completed 22 age assessments on new arrivals between the period of January and October 2026. 11 of those have been accommodated as looked after children.

- 3.9 The Looked After Children's Team have completed four full age assessments in 2026, all four of which concluded with accepting the claimed age. There is a fifth full age assessment in the process of being finalised and there is a sixth age assessment to be started. We have over the summer, and autumn taken five advance referrals from the NTS scheme due to the number of new arrivals into the UK. The rules in offering to take advance referrals allowed the service to specify that they all need to have their claimed age accepted by the home office which has had a positive impact in the total number of age assessments that we need to complete to date. There was one legal challenge which continued from 2025, and the court ruled in favour of the local authority in that the young adult was not providing leave to progress his appeal application for a judicial review.
- 3.10 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.
- 3.11 All of the children seeking safety supported by the Children Looked After Service are male, as are the vast majority supported by the leaving care team, who are supporting five adult young women. Children and young people seeking safety come from a diverse range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The largest single group continue to be from Afghan heritage, followed by Iranian and Sudanese heritage, and a significant number with Kurdish heritage.
- 3.12 As the age profile of children and young people seeking safety is mainly over 18 years, 60 of the young people are being supported live in semi-independent accommodation in the community, with a smaller number of young people living independently, and two young people living with foster carers under 'Staying Put' arrangements. 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.

- 3.13 An increasing number of Children Seeking Safety can add existing pressures within Leicester's housing system, which is already experiencing high demand for affordable and supported accommodation. These young people require stable placements while in care and suitable housing as they transition to independence, placing further demand on limited housing resources. However, strong partnership working between Children's Services and Housing helps to mitigate these challenges through established joint protocols, clear escalation routes, and coordinated planning to ensure housing assistance is provided where required, supporting homelessness prevention and positive outcomes for this vulnerable group.
- 3.14 The council's engaged in a two-day Ofsted Focused Visit in March 2026 to review services to care leavers, including young people from abroad seeking safety. Ofsted stated that *"the support for former children from abroad seeking safety when they leave care is strong. LCAs have a detailed understanding of the asylum process and are focused on supporting young people to achieve stability. Young people are encouraged to explore their culture and integrate into the local community. Most former children seeking safety from abroad are in employment, education or training and are living in accommodation which meets their needs"*.
- 3.15 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.

- 3.16 All young people from abroad aged 18-21 who are eligible care leavers are offered support, advice and assistance from a named Leaving Care Advisor, including support with outstanding asylum or refugee status decisions, and any appeals that may be required; support with Housing and benefit applications once status has been confirmed, and support with Employment Education and Training.
- 3.17 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.
- 3.18 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 students have all secured places at Leicester College. This academic year, the cohort has been split in two. There are two sessions running for year 11 and under (16 and under) and two sessions a week running for 16-year-olds and over, this allows for more young people who are undergoing age assessments to take part and balance safeguarding arrangements. A Lead Officer for children with a social worker currently oversees this cohort.
- 3.19 The Virtual School commission the work of a part time, Specialist Senior Education Psychologist from the Psychology service and 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.

(Appendix One)

- 3.20 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.
- 3.21 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.
- 3.22 The Children's Rights and Participation Service have worked with an open group for children and young people seeking safety to seek their views, wishes and aspirations. Young people who have engaged in the group discussions have spoken positively about feeling listened to by their keyworkers and social workers and feel they have a trusted adults who take their views seriously. However, they consistently share experiences of low moods and loneliness and have shared with each other ways they manage this, such as attending gym, community sports/groups and places of worship. During group sessions, the diversity of languages spoken by the young

people has been supported with interpreters. Discussions highlighted the young people's interests with the similarities between different languages and dialects, as well as their impressive speed they have learnt English.

- 3.23 A recorded podcast is planned for later this year to provide young people with an opportunity to share their experiences directly and will be a tool in helping professionals understand the experiences and perspectives of children seeking safety.

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.

For the 2026/27 financial year, the Home Office will provide £143 per child per night. In addition, further funding is available to incentivise pace and greater participation in the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). Transfers that take place within two working days attract an additional £8,000 and transfers within five working days attract an additional £4,000. Day one is the day of the NTS referral. These incentive schemes run between April and November 2026. The projected claim for 2026/27 is expected to be £2.9m for 131 cases.

Home Office funding ceases automatically the day before the young person turns 18. Home Office payments also cease if the child is absent or missing for more than 28 days consecutively (unless in hospital) or placed in a Young Offenders Institute (YOI).

Signed: Mohammed Irfan, Head of Finance

Dated: 14 October 2026

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 both looked-after UASC and 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 National Referral Mechanism (NRM) for a child.

Signed: Susan Holmes, Head of Law, Social Care and Safeguarding,
Legal Services Dated: 12th October 2026

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: 14 October 2026

4.4. Climate Emergency implications

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

Signed: Phil Ball, Sustainability Officer, Ext 372246

Dated: 14 October 2026

- 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:**

None

6. **Summary of appendices:**

None

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

Introduction

The Creative Journeys intervention is a creative arts intervention consisting of Taiko drumming and arts-based activities. Working alongside, Bullfrog Arts, the Virtual School SSEP has provided enrichment and well-being intervention for the young people seeking safety.

The Creative Journey's Intervention took place over 13 weeks at the ESOL provision for young people seeking safety.

Building on last years' success, the Creative Journey's intervention was extended to provide 10 group sessions of creative arts and 3 sessions of Taiko drumming.

The participants

The young people who took part in the Creative Journeys group were males between the ages of 15-18. The young people were all asylum seekers with limited English language. The young people spoke a range of languages and were all from different countries including Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, Sudan, Kurdistan, Eritrea and Iran.



This year there were 10 participants and 7 regular attenders. The young people are all in attendance at the provision prior to making post 16 college applications. Three of the young people were also on roll in year 11 in mainstream school.

The young people in this group intervention have not been included in the data capture for the Virtual School SSEP casework and consultation.

Psychological Underpinning

The intervention is founded in a strengths-based relational approach, and the secure base model provides a foundation to the intervention. Approaches from narrative psychology were used to support children who have experienced trauma from different cultures (Ncube, 2006; Lahad 2012). Music and arts provide an alternative to language-based intervention and provide opportunity for emotional and relational support.

Aims of the intervention

The research suggests that creative arts help people in reconstructing meaning and connection with others by focusing on resources and creativity (Demott et al., 2017). The aim of this intervention is to promote emotional well-being, language development and cultural understanding in addition to supporting students to consider future plans, and their transition to college.

Session Overview

The language focus of each creative arts session was planned with the ESOL tutor to align areas of language and vocabulary teaching to develop confidence and fluency and to provide opportunity for reflection and further social and emotional support.

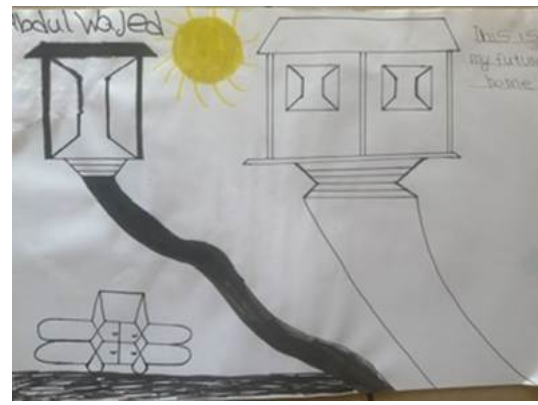
Through the teaching of emotional vocabulary, dialogue and the arts process young peoples' views, thoughts and feelings were shared. The group was supported by a member of the City Psychology Service Community Cohesion Team. This enabled additional conversation and provided reflection on the cultural needs and experiences of the boys.

A selection of artwork

Celebrations



My dream house



Tree of Strengths



Leicester



Clay modelling



Evaluation

The collaborative Creative Journeys project was positively received by staff and students. The Creative Journeys Project has provided students with opportunities to develop enrichment skills in music and art and experience pride and success in work. The ESOL provided weekly verbal feedback regarding the well-being and impact of the Creative Journey's sessions. The English tutor has observed students growing in confidence and expressing their feelings more in class. The students were observed to develop their relationships and their interactions with their classmates. In addition, they learned to interact with different adults.