

Changes to the National Transfer Scheme

Responsibility for unaccompanied asylum seeking children will be more fairly distributed across the UK as part of new and vital updates to the National Transfer Scheme.

The changes to the scheme, announced by the Home Secretary and Education Secretary today (Thursday 10 June), will encourage more local authorities to take part in a planned schedule for taking into care children who arrive in the UK alone and claim asylum – ensuring all areas in the UK play their part.

The scheme will provide local authorities with increased funding and take into account local pressures on local services. By having a 'rota' of these transfers, the updated scheme will provide regions and local authorities with greater clarity as to the number of children to expect and the timing of those placements, allowing them time to plan ahead and better manage their capacity.

Minister for Immigration Compliance and Justice Chris Philp said:

I am grateful for the many local authorities that support a significant number of vulnerable young asylum seekers.

But the current system has not been working as intended with significant pressures being placed on particular areas. Caring for unaccompanied asylum seeking children is a national responsibility, which is why we are introducing a system that will ensure that these children and young people continue to receive the support they need whilst also ensuring a fairer distribution across the UK.

We recognise the financial impact the current asylum system can have on the public purse which is why we are bringing forward the New Plan for Immigration which will fix the broken system welcoming those most in need through safe and legal routes, while preventing abuse of the system.

There are a number of factors informing the new managed approach including the size of the child population in that region, the number of supported asylum seekers and the capacity of children's services.

The improved voluntary scheme includes increased funding totalling more than £20m for local authorities (backdated from 1 April this year) to support former care leavers, and additional support for local authorities.

Minister for Children and Families Vicky Ford said:

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children can be some of the most vulnerable in our care, having often faced dreadful exploitation from traffickers.

We know that many areas have played their part to date but it's absolutely right that local authorities around the country step up and share the role of supporting these young people to settle where appropriate and make valuable contributions to their communities.

Other improvements to the National Transfer Scheme announced today include:

- Distributing a pilot team of expert social workers to support local authorities throughout the UK on age assessment, ahead of broader age assessment reforms under the New Plan for Immigration.
- £6 million Department for Education funding for targeted support for the local authorities facing the biggest pressures in caring for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children during the COVID-19 pandemic. Funding has been distributed to 56 councils in England that applied.

The changes to the National Transfer Scheme will come into effect as soon as possible and are as a result of a joint Home Office and DfE consultation with local authorities across the UK. This saw more than 200 responses including the views of young people and NGOs.

Cllr Nick Forbes, Chair of the Local Government Association's Asylum, Migration and Refugee Task Group, said:

Councils have a strong track record for many years in welcoming asylum-seeking children, working with central government, national partners and regional bodies.

We are pleased that the government has acted on LGA calls for additional funding to help with the challenges faced by councils to provide support to children and young people starting a new life in the UK. This funding will go some way to bridging the gap between government funding and what councils pay to support unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) leaving care.

Councils will continue to face difficulties in finding appropriate homes for these young people, while ongoing challenges around age assessment and asylum claims add uncertainty for both councils and young people. By working closely together, councils and the government can make the national transfer arrangements work to enable all areas of the country to play their part in supporting our asylum system for both children and adults in a fair and transparent way.