

Strategic Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Migrants and Looked After Children

Review	With an increase in migrant children arriving in Ipswich and the increase in looked after children in Ipswich and the County, could this Council investigate what arrangements were being made to house these minors and what happens to them when they reach 18 years of age.
Review Brief	To investigate the impact this has on housing and local hostels in Ipswich and also what other services are being accessed that impact on the community.
Aims/ Objectives of Review	That IBC, after thorough investigation, feel assured that all is being done to make sure that all young people are properly looked after before and after the age of 18.
Councillors	Liz Harsant (Chair) Tracy Grant Shelly Darwin Oliver Holmes
Officers	Pete Whittall (Operations Manager, Housing Advice) Janice Robinson (Democratic Services Manager) Sarah Yule (Principal Accommodation Officer)
Timescales	21 September 2016 – scoping meeting 19 October 2016 – Cliff James, Parenting Services SCC and Rebecca Carrera, Suffolk Refugee Support attended 21 February 2017 - Allison Coleman, Suffolk Refugee Programme 21 March 2017 – Matt Garrod, Benjamin Foundation, Gill Davis, Corporate Parenting, Children & Young Person’s Service, Tash Wightman and Mark Hills, YMCA
Meeting 21 September 2016	
Attendees: Cllr L Harsant Cllr S Darwin Cllr T Grant Pete Whittall Trisha Sutton (Minutes)	

<p>1.1 Pete Whittall reported that it was Suffolk County Council's duty under 'Section 20 of the Children's Act' to provide accommodation for any child in need within their area as a result of no one having parental responsibility, being lost or abandoned or the person caring for them being unable to provide for them and an arrangement and a protocol existed.</p> <p>1.2 Discussion took place about organisations which support 16/17 year olds and these were Catch 22 16+ Leaving Care Service, the YMCA and the Benjamin Foundation. Cliff James was identified as the Head of Corporate Parenting Officer and it was suggested that he be invited to attend the next meeting.</p> <p>1.3 The Home Office had launched a new voluntary transfer arrangement between local authorities for the care of unaccompanied children who arrive in the UK. This National Transfer Scheme encouraged a more even distribution of caring responsibilities across the country. As the intention was to accept children of 16+, there would be no implications on school places although the Clinical Commissioning Groups had been consulted about the health needs of marginalised vulnerable adults.</p> <p>1.4 Suffolk Refugee Support also helped unaccompanied asylum seekers and it was recognised that independent units were often a stepping stone with the help of resettlement groups.</p> <p>Action:</p> <p>1. That a further Task & Finish Group be arranged and Cliff James SCC and Suffolk Refugee Support be invited to attend.</p>	<p>T Sutton</p>
<p>Meeting 19 October 2016</p> <p>Attendees: Cllr L Harsant Cliff James, Parenting Services SCC Rebecca Carrera, Suffolk Refugee Support Pete Whittall Jan Robinson Trisha Sutton (Minutes)</p> <p>1.1 Mr James reported that there were currently 800 'looked after children' in Suffolk, 80% of which were in foster care. Others were in residential children's homes, lodgings or hostels such as the YMCA, with funding being provided for</p>	

their accommodation and with the provision of an allowance. When those in accommodation collected their allowance, checks were made on their health, budgeting and skills advice was offered and supervision was available for the more vulnerable.

1.2 Suffolk County Council worked with many independent organisations to provide accommodation and support such as the Children in Care Council (C2C) and Brighter Futures (up to 12 years) to ensure appropriate care plans were put in place. The Housing Team at IBC worked with Catch 22, the leaving care service for 16+ and over 18's were encouraged to register on the Gateway to Homechoice (bidding scheme), which advertised Council and Housing Association properties in the local authority area.

1.3 Foster carers received funding until the child was 18 years of age, when a 'Staying Put' payment became available to enable those over 18 (up to the age of 21) to stay in the foster care home. If they attended university then the payment was extended to 24 years of age. The Government were currently considering a bill in Parliament which would look to extend this support further as it was acknowledged that average age of those leaving home was now 25 years of age. If still in supported housing at 16/17, there would be no further funding to support them at 18 so if unemployed they would claim benefit and have automatic priority, as a homeless person, to be put in temporary accommodation.

1.4 Some children lived with relatives under a special guardianship order, where legal decisions were made on behalf on the child and where contact with the parents could continue if appropriate. If placed for adoption then a support allowance was paid for 3 years, from the adoption support fund, after which the responsibility of the child became the adopters. Nationally there had been an increase in children taken into care and a Positive Choices Team had been set up to support vulnerable recurrent mothers.

1.5 The quota for unaccompanied children to be placed in Suffolk was 106, mostly 16/17 year olds, with a large number being successfully placed in Ipswich near to the appropriate services. Boarding schools could also be used to place younger unaccompanied children however, placing any unaccompanied child became more of a challenge the older the child.

1.6 Rebecca Carrera from Suffolk Refugee Support said that

<p>the numbers of unaccompanied children were set to increase and she was looking to set up a youth group which would encourage attendance to access academic support. Working with the Police, discussion would also take place about understanding the immigration process.</p> <p>1.7 Mr Whittall said that the organisation Catch 22 provided a support service to improve the life chances of 16-25 year olds although, as many single male asylum seekers over 18 would not have many priority needs they invariably voluntarily moved to the larger cities.</p> <p>1.8 The National Transfer Scheme, which encouraged local authorities to care for migrant children, would allow the managed transfer to be overseen and ensure an even distribution of caring responsibilities across the authorities in the country. The Home Office currently funds the asylum seekers with the 2 year overall spend being £4m although this would impact on IBC in the long term in relation to housing stock and benefits when the migrant children were of age. Education would be offered to younger migrant children as well as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Citizenship courses, with support from other organisations such as the Benjamin Foundation.</p> <p>1.9 The Chair thanked Mr James, Ms Carrera and Officers for attending the meeting.</p>	
<p>Meeting 21 February 2017</p> <p>Attendees: Cllr L Harsant Cllr S Darwin Cllr O Holmes Allison Coleman, Suffolk Refugee Programme Sarah Yule Jan Robinson Trisha Sutton (Minutes)</p> <p>1.1 Work continued with the Police Officers and PCSO's from Central and Southeast Ipswich following the work of Operation Parfait when several arrests had been made of individuals engaged in threatening and intimidating behaviour and thefts and robberies in the town centre.</p> <p>1.2 Catch 22 had been outsourced but was now to come back under Suffolk County Council from April 2017 and multi-agency work would continue. At 16 years of age refugees could register on the waiting list, at 18 years of age they could be placed in the most appropriate accommodation and the Housing Options Team worked closely with the Suffolk Co-ordination Team to access vacancies. The</p>	

	<p>earlier the young people registered to live independently, a better level of support, dependent on their need, could be arranged.</p>	
1.3	<p>Suffolk County Council and the Housing Options Team held the exact statistics but there were approximately 400 looked after children. Foster parents were given provision to continue to look after them at age 16 as they could be given supported lodging up until age 21.</p>	
1.4	<p>Allison Coleman said that all the Housing Associations had now been signed up to the Gateway scheme and all authorities had agreed to the Syrian resettlement scheme for vulnerable people. The Government had stated that an additional 30 refugees would be added to the original agreed 200 who had been displaced from their homes. The total of 230 families would now be approved by The Home Office to be settled into the area which could also include family groups should a vulnerable child be eligible.</p>	
1.5	<p>In Suffolk, the Strategic Migration Partnership was based in West Suffolk House in Bury St Edmunds and their remit had been broadened to co-ordinate the response of these two schemes. Profiles were looked at re: age, health and property suitability and the families did not leave the refugee camp until a property had become available. 10 families of 54 individuals had so far been resettled but the main issue was identifying suitable properties.</p>	
1.6	<p>In respect of spontaneous arrivals, Ipswich could take up to 150 asylum seekers and usually 80-90 people were waiting a decision at any one time. Under 18's immediately became the responsibility of the authority in the area they were dropped off.</p>	
1.7	<p>Initial accommodation would be given and it had been recommended that Woodbridge and Felixstowe be added as preferred towns as due to the pressure of schools and surgeries it was preferred not to group people together. Intensive support was given for form filling, claiming benefits, housing allowance and grants from the Government. The cost of private sector renting was restrictive as although refugees had a 5 year right to stay, it was intended that they found employment as soon as they arrived.</p>	
1.8	<p>106 unaccompanied asylum seeking children under 18, without any other family member, were currently in the area as part of the National Transfer Scheme. As at the beginning of February 2017 there were 58 in care in Suffolk who had been transferred from Kent or from those authorities who had taken over their quota.</p>	
1.9	<p>The Dubs amendment, designed by Lord Dubs to help children caught in conflict, persecution, poverty or fear, be reunited with family members would be stopped at the end of March 2017, as it had been recognised that there could</p>	

<p>be a risk of sexual exploitation, trafficking or abuse.</p> <p>1.10 Due to the lack of availability of foster care in Suffolk, children over 16 who were able, could go into supported care at either the YMCA or other providers, with live in care or mentors.</p> <p>1.11 The Controlling Migration Fund administered by the Department of Communities and Local Government offered grants to support local areas facing pressure linked to immigration such as; for ESOL courses or Mental Health Support and schools also received an additional contribution payment.</p> <p>1.12 Councillor Darwin pointed out that many private landlords were currently unable to get house insurance when it was known that asylum seeking refugees would be housed in the properties.</p> <p>1.13 It was suggested that representatives of Catch 22 and the YMCA be invited to the next meeting of the Task & Finish Group.</p>	
<p>Meeting 21 March 2017</p> <p>Attendees: Cllr L Harsant Cllr T Grant Cllr O Holmes Matt Garrod, Benjamin Foundation Gill Davis, Suffolk County Council, CYP Services Tash Wightman, YMCA Mark Hills, YMCA Bridie Green Jan Robinson Trisha Sutton (Minutes)</p> <p>1.1 Matt Garrod said that the Benjamin Foundation offered a range of services in Norfolk and Suffolk from supervised to supported lodging accommodation to 16/17 year olds in foster care, in the care of local hosts or in the care of the local authorities. There was a robust process in place (delivered on behalf of SCC) to find hosts who fulfilled the appropriate DBS checks, which was a less rigorous process than fostering.</p> <p>1.2 Mark Hills said that the YMCA currently provided accommodation across 3 sites, at Wellington Street, Ipswich, The Mix, Stowmarket and at Newmarket Open Door. At Ipswich housing related support was offered to 16-25 year olds which included unaccompanied asylum seekers and mothers and babies and at Stowmarket there were 8 rooms available for accommodation. From April</p>	

2017 there would be 26 rooms available in Bury St Edmunds of which, 16 would be available for 16-21 year olds.

- 1.3 Gill Davis said that there were currently 68 unaccompanied asylum seekers in Suffolk, some of which had been taken in under the Government 'National Transfer Scheme' which aimed to share the responsibility across all authorities. The target given under the 'Dubs amendment' scheme was 106 children but only 4 authorities had so far reached their target.
- 1.4 The team at Suffolk County Council had been expanded to include specialist social workers with the aim of preventing the refugees not becoming 'NEET's but there was a lack of available foster carers (a national challenge) and ESOL provision. SCC were looking to bid to the 'Controlling Migration Fund' to improve access to English Language lessons for refugees.
- 1.5 An SCC Officer dedicated to the service processed the contracts for services and screened refugees as they arrived to signpost them to the appropriate services available. Service providers were often only on short term contracts (for 2 years) with the possibility of a further 2 extra years, which could be disruptive. From a provider perspective this could make long term planning for any company very difficult in terms of long term sustainability. It meant being reactive rather than preventative and although that was the nature of grant based funding, it was difficult to be strategic and longer contracts could provide more cost efficient services.
- 1.6 Ms Green the Senior Housing Options Manager said that up to 100, 1 bedroom flats were let to tenants every year via Gateway to Homechoice with around 1500 waiting on the housing register which included those needing to move on but for a parent with a child, 2 bedroom properties were required. Under Section 20 of the Children's Act 1989 the local authority were required to provide accommodation to 16/17 year olds but at 18 years old the accommodation duty ended so they would need to make a homelessness application if there was not adequate planning for their long term housing needs.
- 1.7 Ms Wightman confirmed that there were 12 self-contained ground floor flats at the YMCA for mothers and children. If there were any more than 12 who required accommodation the responsibility fell to IBC to provide this. Mr Garrod spoke of the importance of having a

breadth of accommodation available or a 'housing pathway'. Mr Hills said that funding was being reduced considerably yet more buildings were needed to provide accommodation based on the required need.

- 1.8 Discussion took place about the new housing solution the Y:Cube scheme which provided supported accommodation for those struggling to afford the costs of private rent. There had also been a reported 50% increase in rough sleeping with the concern that this could rise even higher. Mr Green said that there was also pressure from those requiring temporary accommodation. It was acknowledged that migrants favoured Ipswich as a positive place to settle but this was draining the available resources.

Actions:

1. **The Y:Cube scheme be investigated to provide additional, much needed accommodation.**
2. **A longer timescale for commissioning contracts be investigated to allow providers more time to achieve strategic sustainability.**
3. **The organisations providing English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision be more co-ordinated in the services they provided.**
4. **The Chief Executive to speak to the Suffolk Leaders, about other authorities contributing to support the housing services offered by IBC.**
5. **Other buildings, such as those which had previously been used as care homes, be considered as suitable supported housing.**
6. **The Housing Options Team to review temporary accommodation to assist the flow of young people requiring housing.**
7. **An up to date position about the availability of properties be submitted to the Committee.**
8. **Due to the lack of foster carers, an advertising campaign be launched to promote this vital support service.**