

National Transfer Scheme to become mandatory for all local authorities

Today (Tuesday 23 November), the Minister for Safe and Legal Migration, Kevin Foster, has written to all local authorities with children's services across the UK to inform them of the government's intention to temporarily mandate the National Transfer Scheme.

Under this change all local authorities have been given legal notice to accept transfers of children into their care, providing crucial placements to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC).

The decision to mandate the scheme is vital to ensure unaccompanied asylum-seeking children receive the critical care they need and end the use of hotels for them following the unprecedented recent pressure placed on the asylum system.

Whilst many local authorities have been providing support under the voluntary scheme announced in the summer, this is a national issue that requires all local authorities play their part. Therefore, urgent steps must be taken to ensure immediate, fuller participation that is fair for all local authorities with children's services across all parts of the country.

The Home Office continues to constructively engage with local government partners in England, Scotland, Wales and the Northern Ireland Executive and their contribution is crucial to making the scheme a success.

Minister Kevin Foster, the Minister for Safe and Legal Migration said:

It's right we do all we can to protect unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, many of whom have gone through dangerous journeys and been exploited by despicable people smugglers.

I am grateful for the continued, and invaluable, support of local authorities across the country who have provided crucial placements to vulnerable young asylum-seekers.

This decision has not been taken lightly but it is in the best interests of these children to make sure they receive the support they need.

The Home Office will consider a number of factors when transferring children to a local authority including the existing child population, the number of supported asylum seekers and pressures on children's services, and the best interests of the child.

Local Authorities will not need to accept unaccompanied asylum-seeking children where this cohort already makes up 0.07% or more of their general

child population.

The scheme will be kept under review and the length of time for mandating will be determined by a range of factors including intake levels and how long it takes to end the use of hotels.

Local authorities will have a 14 day notice period where representations may be put forward regarding a transfer which will be given careful consideration. A start date for mandatory National Transfer Scheme transfers will be confirmed as soon as possible following the initial notice period.

Children and Families Minister, Will Quince said:

It is often the case that some of the most vulnerable children in our care are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

Through the National Transfer Scheme, we know that many councils across the country have already stepped up to fulfil their duty to care for these children. But this responsibility must be more equally shared between councils, which is why we will be mandating temporary transfers where appropriate, so that these children can access the support services they need and become successful members of their local communities.

Following last year's joint consultation with the Home Office and Department of Education, an extra £20 million of additional funding was made available to support the needs of these children.

In order to support local authorities in supporting children, any local authority receiving a child transferred under the scheme now receives a funding contribution at the higher rate of £143 per child per night.

In addition, the government increased the contribution for all former UASC care leavers from £240 per person per week to £270 per person per week. These changes follow a significant uplift in funding in June 2020.

The National Transfer Scheme allows unaccompanied asylum-seeking children to be moved to a different local authority to begin a care placement rather than responsibility falling disproportionately on certain local authorities.

Cllr Georgia Gould, Chair of London Councils, said:

We welcome the decision to make the national transfer scheme mandatory to create more capacity for councils to do this crucial work, which is something London Councils has long been calling for.

London boroughs are currently caring for 1,500 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children – a third of the national total. These children enter the country having faced difficult and traumatic circumstances from a young age and need specialist support to make

a fresh start.

Boroughs believe that a mandatory national transfer scheme is an important first step in a different and fairer approach to responding to this national challenge and we look forward to working with government on this.

The Borders and Nationality Bill is making its way through Parliament to overhaul the decades old broken asylum system. This legislation marks the most significant overhaul of our asylum system in decades and will end the cycle of endless appeals and abuse of the system.