

Report Title: Sufficiency Strategy, Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

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1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide an update in relation to Children’s sufficiency strategy in relation to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.

Summary

The National Transfer Scheme was introduced in 2016. It was launched to encourage all local authorities to volunteer to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) in order that there is a more even distribution of caring responsibilities across the country. Under the scheme, a child arriving in one local authority area already under strain caring for unaccompanied asylum seeking children may be transferred to another council with capacity.

The National Transfer Scheme became mandatory in 2022; originally, the expectation was for each LA to accept 0.7% of its child population in terms of transfers, however this subsequently rose to 0.1%. Since this time, the numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, and subsequently care experienced young adults, transferring or presenting to Torbay has significantly increased.

Torbay have supported the following numbers of cared for and care experienced UASC since 2017-18:

	Numbers of cared for UASC (fluctuates over the year)	Numbers of care experienced UASC (fluctuates over the year)
2017-18	5	0
2018-19	4	0
2019-20	0	3
2020-21	0	3
2021-22	8	1
2022-23	38	3
2023-24	24	18
2024-25 to date	18	28

Referrals have been received in respect of 47 potential UASC, 24 through the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) and 23 through representations from the local asylum hotels.

The need for age assessments was identified in respect to 27 individuals, 23 who presented from the local asylum hotel and four in relation to young people who transferred under the National Transfer Scheme, following which further information raised the need for age to be assessed. Please see the previous paper which outlined the expectations in terms of the age assessment process. Twenty-five age assessments have been concluded: twelve of these concluded that age was accepted, and thirteen concluded that the individual was an adult.

As of the 28th of October 2024, Torbay supports six cared for UASC and 28 care experienced UASC. A significant number of cared for UASC have turned eighteen in the last six months, reducing our overall cared for cohort and increasing the care experienced cohort. As such, Torbay are significantly below their 0.1% figure of 25 and are submitting our figures to the Home Office on a monthly basis and remain subject to referrals from the National Transfer Scheme on a cycle basis. However, we have three live referrals who are pending transfer from the Home Office as part of the National Transfer Scheme, in addition to two anticipated referrals from the week beginning the 4th November 2024. These five UASC will be supported in the additional Young Devon provision outlined below.

In recognition of the enhanced sufficiency required to meet the needs of Torbay's UASC cohort, for the Millbrook provision a waiver variation has been requested to extend provision in alignment with the approved end date of the block contract, which is 31st March 2026. This extension will ensure the continuation of vital support for young people already accommodated. The waiver is sought for an 18-month period, from 1st December 2024 to 31st March 2026, allowing for ongoing essential services while a wider review and procurement activities are undertaken to establish new contracts starting 1st April 2026. Previously, a waiver was requested for a 12-month period from 1st December 2023 to 30th November 2024, with the expectation that the review and procurement options would be completed by that time. However, the timeline for the re-commissioning of 16-plus supported accommodation has since been extended and approved, resulting in the current block contracts being extended until March 2026.

Furzebrake, a Torbay-owned property, complements Millbrook by offering similar floating support for up to three UASC placements aged 18 and over.

As of 28th October 2024, a further UASC-specific provision at Barton Road, comprising 5 units, has been launched, already accommodating three young people aged 16-18. The Barton House hub, as part of the supported accommodation service, is committed to providing high-quality, trauma-informed support tailored to UASC. This environment is designed to equip residents with the skills, knowledge, and access to services needed for a successful transition to adulthood and independent living. A psychologically informed approach fosters authentic, transformative relationships, facilitating the shared objectives of the supported accommodation service.

Further to the UASC specific provisions above, there are additional two UASC young people accommodated under lot2A provision - one at Grosvenor Road YD and one at the Foyer LiveWest.

The financial recompense provided for the support required for UASC and the age assessment process is insufficient in terms of meeting need and this has been outlined in previous reports to the Board. Based on our own financial tracking, the cost of the age assessment process [which is more aligned to four to five months, as opposed to one month] can be in the region of £40,000 on the basis of up to five month assessment period. This does not include placement costs, cared for costs, staffing and workforce costs. The overall total spend on UASC related service delivery in 2023-24 was £535,000. This has a direct impact on the overall placement budget (which has risen increasingly over the last three years).

The placement budget increases year on year:

Year	Budgeted	Actual
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2021-22	£17,188,100	£18,547,000
2022-23	£18,006,845	£19,882,000
2023-24	£19,177,311	£22,346,000
2024-25	£22,034,315	£10,839,214 spend to date

There is a particular financial pressure in relation to care experienced UASC. The financial recompense per young person reduces at that point to £270 a week. As care experienced UASC do not have recourse to public funds pending the outcome of their asylum claim and achieving settled status, the duty to accommodate this cohort of young people remains with Children's; with the average semi-independent provision costing between £500-£900 a week and other housing options limited, there is a gap between the funding available and the funding needed to sufficiently support this group. Financial mapping in relation to those UASC turning eighteen this financial year indicates a further budget pressure of £250,000. In addition to this, there are substantial delays in the Home Office claims being processed, which adds to the financial pressure and complicates our ability to plan and map resources.

The sufficiency of housing for our care experienced young people is low. They are given band B status however the waiting time remains significant. This results in young people remaining in block contract accommodation which exceeds both their need and the age criteria of their placement. This further results in those provisions becoming 'blocked' and move-on to independence plans being stifled by a bottleneck situation in which 16-19 year olds are not able to move into the housing which has been identified to meet their needs.

Currently, we have four young people who are placed in Grosvenor Road who are ready to move on however they have not been successful in securing permanent homes. The support and understanding that is needed to assist these young people to bid on Devon Home Choice is a Corporate Parenting responsibility and should be a joint effort by both the Care Experienced team and Housing together. A new protocol introduced by Devon Home Choice has been applied whereby those who are applying to Devon Home Choice receive Band B at age 16. This will reduce the waiting time and is a welcome step in supporting this situation. However, it is a recent development and could be strengthened by a strategic joint response whereby the necessity for bidding is reviewed.

The recent successful SHAP bid and plan by the YMCA to create over 20 units of accommodation for our young people has been impacted upon by the recent decision by the lack of planning approval. This is hugely disappointing but also contributes to the severe lack of accommodation for our cared experienced young people in the Bay and from the Bay. There is also no specific sufficiency for those with SEND needs and limited availability to provide adapted accommodation for disabled children in an emergency. This is particularly importance as this cohort of care experienced young people with additional needs are impacted even more significantly by change, or unplanned or unclear transitions.

The UASC care experienced young people previously placed out of area who have turned 18 are supported to secure accommodation in the area that they choose, aligned to the Local Offer. However, we have encountered many challenges to this. Those placed in cities find it challenging to secure private rented accommodation and we have experienced that other Local Authorities can refuse to recognize their connection with the local area because they were placed with Torbay upon arrival.

The lack of suitable accommodation in the area complicates this situation and we have four young people that will potentially return to the Bay which will reduce the sufficiency further and add significant challenge to the move on planning that is in place for our cohort of cared for young people aged sixteen to seventeen.

2. Recommendations

*That the Board note the information within this report, including the actions being taken to ensure a sufficient response to the needs of Torbay's UASC.