



Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (USAC) Strategy

December 2024

Introduction

UASC definition

An unaccompanied asylum-seeking child is defined as an individual who is:

- under 18 years old when the asylum application is submitted;
- is separated from both parents and is not being cared for by an adult who in law or by custom has a responsibility to do so;
- applying for asylum in the United Kingdom in their own right.

Unaccompanied asylum seeking-children (UASC) are some of the most vulnerable children in our society due to their age, separation from parents and carers and distance from their home. Some will have experienced significant adversity, trauma and loss on their journey to the UK and may have experienced exploitation or have been trafficked. They are children who need access to a range of public services to offer them support and accommodation to promote their safety, health and wellbeing. These children also show remarkable resilience, independence, and strength which must also be reflected in the development of policies and practice to support them.

Supporting UASC is a complex area of work because of the specific issues and challenges these children face, but also because of significant pressures on local authority placement availability and resources. This is exacerbated by:

- The number of children arriving
- The impact of continuing care
- A decline in the number of foster carers
- Reduction in internal residential capacity
- Restrictions on residential capacity
- Growing pressures on already stretched social work teams and a lack of suitable move on accommodation due to housing pressures.
- Financial pressures because of an increased use of costly external provision, either for UASC or local children.

(REFERENCE COSLA SCOPING PAPER)

UASC are entitled to the same local authority support as any other looked after child. Our aspiration for children and young people arriving in Fife, either via the National Transfer Scheme or spontaneous arrivals, is to provide them with a safe and welcoming home. We want to provide the care they need to thrive and support to improve outcomes in all aspects of their lives.

This strategy aims to support services in Fife to work together in close partnership to meet our aims and to comply with our statutory duties and human rights obligations to UASC.

To support this aspiration Fife has established a UASC Working Group. The purpose of the group is to:

- Develop policy and practice in line with national developments.
- Data reporting to support planning to increase placement capacity.
- Developing the skills and confidence of the workforce through revised guidance, information and resources
- Listening to the views of children and young people to understand the challenges/issues facing them and those working with them.

National Transfer Scheme and Rota Allocation

The National Transfer Scheme (NTS) is the mechanism to transfer the statutory responsibility for UASC from one local authority to another local authority, enabling the safe dispersal of UASC across the UK.

This is a data led process designed to achieve an equitable distribution of caring responsibilities across the UK by weighting factors that have been identified as key pressures by local authorities. These are:

- General child population
- Looked after children
- UASC population
- Former UASC care leaver population
- Supported asylum population

The rota issues transfers to local authorities from within a set block of referrals, known as a tranche. A tranche is broken down into four smaller “cycles” to allow local authorities to receive transfers in a managed and cyclical manner.

Legislation to support unaccompanied children

The legal status of unaccompanied children is governed by several laws and policies in Scotland, including:

Children (Scotland) Act 1995

Section 25 requires local authorities to provide accommodation and safeguarding for unaccompanied children up to the age of 18, regardless of their immigration status. Once a child is provided with these services, they become a “looked after child.”

Section 29 requires local authorities to assess the needs of care leavers and provide advice, guidance and assistance until they are 26 years old.

Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014

Section 29 of the Act outlines the full range of ‘aftercare’ supports that can be made available to young people who leave care. This Act amended the 1995 Act by extending the age range of young people eligible for aftercare and specifying a duty to provide young people between 19 and 26, regardless of their placement type while looked after, with the opportunity to apply to the local authority for aftercare.

Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015

Section 12 of the act requires local authorities to assume that a victim of human trafficking is a child if there are reasonable grounds to believe they are under 18 for the purpose of receiving immediate age-appropriate support and services until their age is formally established.

UN Convention on the Right of the Child

This convention requires states to take appropriate measures to ensure that children seeking refuge status receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance.

Independent Child Trafficking Guardian Service

A statutory service that provides unaccompanied children a guardian to navigate the asylum and welfare process. Local authorities have a duty to refer eligible young people to the service provider as soon as is reasonably possible.

The Promise

Scotland's promise to care experienced children and young people is that they will grow up loved, safe and respected.

Plan 24-30 outlines particular focus areas under each foundation which require a collective response to meet challenges and drive change to ensure The Promise is kept.

Care – focus must be on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people, as the number entering Scotland's 'care system' has meant that an already stretched system is not well equipped to meet their needs (reference).

Placement pathway

Evidence shows that the provision of suitable accommodation is crucial for this vulnerable group of children, to ensure they are safe, protected and able to recover from the trauma that they have experienced in their journey to Scotland. These protections are also crucial to reduce the risk of trafficking or re-trafficking.

On transferring to Fife, young people over 16 will be provided with accommodation under s29 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 either through homes of multiple occupancy (HMO) or in our Adult Placement Service.

For all children under 16 they will be provided with accommodation under s25 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 in Foster Care.

The Kinship Team will undertake family finding for all children and young people transferring to Fife.

Appendix 1 Asylum Seeker Welcome Information

Appendix 2 Welcome to Thornton, Scotland

Current national picture

The New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy: Delivery Plan 2024-2026 (link) has been led by the Scottish Government, COSLA and the Scottish Refugee Council. This sets out Scotland's approach to support people to 'build meaningful and sustainable lives here'. The vision is 'for a welcoming Scotland where refugees and people seeking asylum are able to rebuild their lives from the day they arrive'. [New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy: 2024 - gov.scot](#)

What we will do in Fife

Fife's Strategy is aligned to the principles set out in the New Scot Strategy.

Principle - Integration from day one of arrival

New Scots should be supported to integrate into communities as soon as they arrive in Scotland, and not just once they have been granted leave to remain. Suitable accommodation and access to education support better health and wellbeing outcomes.

How will this be achieved?

- Referral to LAAC Nurse regardless of legal status on arrival
- Enrolment into catchment school or college
- Additional ESOL classes through Learning Centre's
- Over 16's either provided with accommodation through homes of multiple occupancy (HMO) or in our Adult Placement Service
- Those residing in HMO's have access to visiting support by their allocated Social Worker's through the Young People Team.

Principle - A rights-based approach

New Scots should be empowered to understand and exercise their rights.

How will this be achieved?

- Referral to the Aberlour Guardianship Service on arrival
- Use of interpreters during initial welcome with the Young Peoples Team and for all Pathway Reviews.
- Occupancy Agreements provided on arrival to support New Scot's to understand their entitlements and level of welfare and financial support that they will be offered by their allocated Social Worker.

Principle - Restorative and trauma-informed

Research shows that New Scots experience repeated trauma at multiple stages of their journey. Practices should be trauma-informed and services trauma-responsive. This means that services acknowledge the trauma that asylum seekers have experienced and

respond in a way to reduce the impact of trauma, so that people can feel safe and have more control of their lives.

How will this be achieved?

- All Social Work staff trained to Trauma Level 3 to inform their practice in working with New Scot's
- Initial Pathway Assessment to be undertaken within 6 weeks of arrival in Fife for New Scot's to holistically understand their welfare needs. Taking into account the trauma they have experienced and referring to CAMHS or third sector organisations where required.
- Supported Lodging's carers are included within a Supported Lodging's UASC working group to share experiences in supporting New Scot's with experiences of trauma and from a wide range of cultural backgrounds.

Principle - Involvement of people with lived experience of forced displacement

Policy, strategic planning and legislation should be shaped through participation by people with lived experience of resettlement and dispersal and informed by their rights, needs and aspirations.

How will this be achieved?

- Service Wide UASC working group attended by relevant C+F Social Work teams, Fife's Resettlement Team, Housing Department, Education and Promise Lead Officer to shape future strategies and policies in Fife based on their experience of working with New Scot's and feedback received directly by young people and those directly providing care for them.
- Establish a Youth Advisory Group to shape future strategies and policies.

Principle - Inclusive, intercultural communities

Integration practices should recognise and foster the skills and knowledge of New Scots and people from receiving communities. Ensuring access to language and cultural learning and practices which support positive intercultural interactions within communities.

How will this be achieved?

- Wide engagement with communities, local services and third sector groups to be central to Fife's inclusive approach to integration within communities.
- Introductions to local Police and Fire Service staff on arrival in HMO properties
- Introduction to learning centres that can support large groups of New Scots to access addition ESOL learning and share this experience.
- Community Development Officer's to arrange a variety of activities such as cooking classes, life skills, employability classes and budgeting
- Youth Worker's identified by Fife Learning centres to work with New Scots in evenings on projects that they are interested in, such as five aside football, mountain biking, and arts and crafts.

- Access to community engagement opportunities such as “Warm Welcome” in Thornton

Principle - Partnership and collaboration

Those involved in supporting New Scots must work together as equal, drawing on knowledge and resources to achieve collective goals.

How will this be achieved?

- UASC Working Group will provide collaborative oversight of all work being undertaken to support young New Scots who arrive in Fife and to amend our UASC strategy accordingly.

Assessment and C S Plan (2026-29)

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