



Home Office

Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF



Department
for Education

Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London

25 May 2018

Anne Longfield
Children's Commissioner for England
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Dear Anne,

We are writing to you to update you on progress made on the commitments in the Safeguarding Strategy for unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children that the Government published on 1st November 2017. Since then, officials across the Department for Education (DfE) and the Home Office have continued to work closely with local authorities and key local partners to progress the Strategy's commitments and we are pleased to be able to update you on a number of areas of progress. We are copying this letter to the Children's Commissioners in each of the devolved administrations.

Supporting professionals working with children and young people

We committed to revising statutory guidance for local authorities and other agencies looking after unaccompanied children. The revised guidance was published in November in parallel with the strategy and reflects a considerable expansion in information and guidance. The guidance has also been expanded to address safeguarding of all unaccompanied migrant children, not just asylum seeking children.

In the Strategy, we committed to sharing good practice resources for social workers and personal advisers on "triple pathway planning" to prepare these children for all possible eventualities after they cease to be looked after children at the age of 18. We know that for unaccompanied children, this is a matter often surrounded by anxiety and uncertainty because their future is so closely linked to their asylum decision. When they turn 18 they may have been granted asylum, refused and required to leave the UK or continue to pursue their claim, application or appeal. As

well as being a time of uncertainty for the young person, we also recognise that planning with three potential outcomes in mind is something that many social workers and personal advisers find challenging. We have grant funded the London Borough of Islington and the No Recourse to Public Fund Network (NRPFN), to develop guidance and toolkit resources for social workers and personal advisers to use as part of their ongoing support to those unaccompanied children approaching 18.

In addition, we are working to develop downloadable training resources to enable social workers to understand when and how they should be involved in a child's asylum claim. We are starting by developing a clear process map which sets out the key points in an unaccompanied child's journey when he or she requires support from his or her social worker. DfE officials will be in touch with you to share this scoping work in its early stages.

Improving the care of unaccompanied children

We committed to commissioning 1,000 training places for foster carers and support workers caring for unaccompanied children. On 18 April, we published an invitation to tender for an organisation to deliver the 1,000 training places. This training will equip carers with heightened confidence, knowledge and skills to build strong trusting bonds with these children. This skill is key to reducing the risk of these children going missing from their care placements and being trafficked onwards for sexual, economical and other forms of exploitation and harmful influence including the risk of being radicalised.

In the coming months, the Government will respond to the Education Select Committee's inquiry into fostering and the Foster Care in England report, produced by Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers. I know that you made a significant and valuable contribution to the reviewers' research and we are grateful to you for the insight you offered. We are carefully considering the recommendations from both reports, not least because they both highlighted the need for more capacity in the system to accommodate teenagers, sibling groups and children and young people with disabilities or special needs. They both also highlighted the challenges that local authorities face in commissioning the right placements at the right times, with foster carers with the right skills, to meet the needs of the children and young people in their care.

We need to consider how we help local authorities to better understand the capacity of their local market and to plan for sufficiency within the system for all placements. We also need to identify what steps we need to take to ensure that there are available placements and foster carers with the necessary skills to support all citizen and unaccompanied children for whom fostering offers the best option. In the meantime, over the next few months, we will be developing myth-busting resources for supporting the recruitment of foster carers for unaccompanied children, and working with a number of local authorities who have been grant funded through the Controlling Migration Fund to increase fostering capacity.

Information and advice for children and families

We committed to ensuring that children receive clear and accurate information in a format they are able to digest, thereby allowing them to understand better the immigration and asylum process and public services in the UK, and helping them adapt to their new environment. We are working with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure that this information is accessible for its intended audience. The Home Office is in the process of producing a “point of claim” leaflet for unaccompanied asylum seeking children that will meet this need. They are seeking feedback on the draft document from young people before it is finalised and it will be produced in different languages to reflect the main nationalities of unaccompanied children who arrive in the UK.

Protection and safeguarding

Over the past year, DfE officials have worked closely with the Home Office to undertake “deep dive” visits to those local authorities with high numbers of missing unaccompanied children to understand and identify risk factors and effective local responses. We are now leading further work with stakeholders including several local authorities, strategic migration partners and other members of the ADCS group on key issues identified and our officials will be very happy to share this work with you.

The Safeguarding Strategy includes a commitment to pilot a standardised process for police when they first encounter an unaccompanied child. Hertfordshire Police has implemented a First Encounter Pilot which seeks to ensure that unaccompanied children who are found in the UK are appropriately safeguarded. Hertfordshire Police has worked with partners, including local authorities to complete an initial welfare assessment to ensure that concerns about a child’s welfare are correctly identified at the earliest opportunity and effective measures put in place. As part of the pilot, children have been taken to an appropriate place to conduct these welfare assessments rather than being arrested and taken into police custody. Biometric information (fingerprints and photographs) have been taken to help police and other law enforcement agencies to locate children if they subsequently go missing.

Reviewing processes for children in Europe

The Government committed to continue to do all it can to overcome barriers to the timely and efficient operation of the Dublin III Regulation. We are pleased to update that as part of the Sandhurst Treaty, signed between the UK and France on 18th January 2018, through the Home Office, the Government has committed to providing a £3.6 million development fund intended to be used for projects which support claims through the Dublin process and ensure that those with no prospect of transferring to the UK are informed of their options. The implementation of the Sandhurst Treaty is overseen by the UK-France Migration Committee attended by senior officials from the French Ministry of Interior and the Home Office. The Home

Office is currently in the process of agreeing with French counterparts the asylum elements of the Treaty including Dublin development and reception funding.

Family assessments to support the reunification of children and families under the Dublin Regulation is a new area of activity for local authorities, due to the recent increase in the number of unaccompanied children present in Europe who are eligible for transfer under the Regulation. The Government committed to provide clear guidance for local authorities to support these families. We are addressing the needs of children arriving in the UK under Dublin arrangements by revising the family and friends care statutory guidance in close consultation with local authorities and social workers who have been involved in supporting high numbers of Dublin cases. We launched a public consultation on 10th May to run over the summer, on the proposed revised guidance, with a view to publishing it early in the autumn.

We want to provide the right future support for children and families reunited under the Dublin Regulation by learning from experiences of families to date. We are preparing to commission research that captures evidence as to what informs and grows good practice to give these families the best chance of settling well in the UK. We have invited research organisations to submit expressions of interest to start the work in early summer.

Implementation and measuring success

The Government has fulfilled its commitment to publish data on the children transferred from elsewhere in the EU to the UK as follows:

- In November 2017, we published data on the cases transferred from Calais to the UK. The data can be found at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transfers-of-children-to-the-uk-from-the-calais-operation-november-2017>.
- In November 2017, we published data on the number of children transferred within the UK under the National Transfer Scheme. We will continue to publish quarterly updates.
- In February 2018, we published data on the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children transferred from Europe to the UK Under the Dublin III Regulation. The data can be found at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-statistics-october-to-december-2017/how-many-people-do-we-grant-asylum-or-protection-to#dublin-regulation>.
- Data for those transferred under Section 67 of the 2016 Immigration Act (the so-called Dubs amendment) will be published once the scheme is delivered.

We will be placing a copy of this letter in the House libraries, and trust that it demonstrates the progress that the Government has made to make the commitments in the Safeguarding Strategy a reality. We recognise that much of this work has been progressed through the dedication of our key stakeholders and

dedication from frontline professionals and practitioners. We look forward to your continued support.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Caroline Noakes". The signature is written in a cursive style, with the first name "Caroline" on the top line and the last name "Noakes" on the bottom line.

Caroline Noakes MP
Minister of State for Immigration

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "N. Zahawi". The signature is written in a cursive style, with the first name "N." on the top line and the last name "Zahawi" on the bottom line.

Nadhim Zahawi MP
**Parliamentary Under Secretary of
State for Children and Families**