



Home Office

Chris Philp MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of
State

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Local Authority Chief Executives, Council Leaders and Directors of Children's Services

Dear all,

Consultation with the local government sector on the National Transfer Scheme

We are writing to seek your views on potential changes to the operation of the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). We would first like to express our gratitude for the invaluable support that so many local authorities are providing to vulnerable young asylum seekers. Many local authorities supporting young asylum seekers frequently highlight that they are extremely rewarding young people to work with. However, we recognise that this work is undertaken in often challenging circumstances.

As you will be aware, the NTS was introduced in July 2016 to try to achieve a more balanced distribution of UASC across the UK. It was initially successful, with nearly 900 voluntary NTS transfers taking place between July 2016 and December 2018. However, after that point, the scheme slowed significantly and is now not working as intended. This has intensified issues with unequal distribution. The attached anonymised tables show indicative numbers of UASC supported by local authorities and nations in the UK at March 2020. They illustrate powerfully the pressures on the local authorities and parts of the UK who are taking a disproportionately high share of UASC. It is only equitable that all local authorities and parts of the UK bear their fair share and we must ensure that this happens.

In recent weeks, a number of local authorities have responded to the extremely challenging circumstances faced by vulnerable children arriving on the south coast and have started to offer placements through the NTS again. We are very grateful to those local authorities who have stepped in to help these children and young people. We are very keen to build on the success of these transfers and this collaborative effort across the UK. It remains our

ambition to achieve a more sustainable NTS, which ensures the welfare of these vulnerable children continues to be safeguarded.

Our officials have been engaging closely with local authorities and others in the sector to improve their understanding of barriers to participation in the NTS and develop shared ideas on how these can be addressed. A key issue has been funding for those UASC who go on to become care leavers. As you are aware from Minister Philp's letter of 8 June, the Home Office has increased the funding contribution for local authorities looking after former UASC care leavers and has also further increased the rates for UASC being cared for in local authorities where UASC make up more than 0.07% of their child population. We trust that this funding uplift demonstrates our commitment to understanding and addressing your concerns.

A further key barrier to participation in the NTS has been the lack of certainty over the number of children local authorities will be required to support and when they will arrive. Central to the proposed changes is a national rota system which builds on the success of rotas within some regions of the UK. While UASC intake is not entirely predictable, the hope is that this change will give more certainty and transparency to local authorities. The attached proposal paper has been developed in close consultation with local government representatives across the UK and provides more details.

Our strong preference is to work collaboratively with you to revitalise the NTS and achieve a sustainable system for UASC arriving in the UK. However, should efforts to increase participation on a voluntary basis fail, it remains an option under the provisions of the Immigration Act 2016 to mandate transfers under the NTS. This could operate either to replace the voluntary NTS as the primary mechanism for transfers or as an exceptional process to be deployed only when required by circumstances. This is not our preferred option; however, we are interested in your thoughts and early views on this option.

We are keen that this process captures views from as many local authorities as possible to inform and shape the new NTS operating model. We would therefore be grateful if you could complete the attached proforma and return it to NTSconsultation@homeoffice.gov.uk by 30 September. This seeks broad feedback on the proposal, the option of mandation and your insights into any further improvements to the NTS.

In addition, there will be opportunities to speak directly with ourselves/senior officials to ask questions and offer reflections. More details will be circulated via regional Strategic Migration Partnerships.

Minister Philp is writing in similar terms to local authorities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

We look forward to continuing to work with you to achieve our shared objective of ensuring that vulnerable young people receive the support they need.

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Chris Philp MP

Minister for Immigration, Compliance and the Courts

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Vicky Ford', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Vicky Ford MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families