

Thurrock: An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future

Hidden and Extreme Harms Prevention Committee

The meeting will be held at **7.00 pm** on **16 December 2021**

South Essex College, High Street, Grays, RM17 6TF in room W1.23

Membership:

Councillors Gary Collins (Chair), Alex Anderson (Vice-Chair), Qaisar Abbas, Bukky Okunade, Shane Ralph and Elizabeth Rigby

Substitutes:

Councillors

Agenda

Open to Public and Press

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1 Apologies for Absence

2 Minutes

5 - 18

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Hidden and Extreme Harms Prevention Committee held on 2 November 2021 (the postponed meeting of 21 October 2021).

3 Items of Urgent Business

To receive additional items that the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency, in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972.

4 Declarations of Interest

| | | |
|----------|--|----------------|
| 5 | Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers Introductory Report (continued from 2 November 2021 meeting) | 19 - 30 |
| 6 | Essex Police: Verbal Update | |
| 7 | Violence Against Women and Girls/Men and Boys Verbal Discussion with SERICC | |
| 8 | Work Programme | 31 - 32 |

Queries regarding this Agenda or notification of apologies:

Please contact Grace Le, Senior Democratic Services Officer by sending an email to

Agenda published on: **8 December 2021**

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DECLARING INTERESTS FLOWCHART – QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Breaching those parts identified as a pecuniary interest is potentially a criminal offence

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- *Is your register of interests up to date?*
- *In particular have you declared to the Monitoring Officer all disclosable pecuniary interests?*
- *Have you checked the register to ensure that they have been recorded correctly?*

When should you declare an interest at a meeting?

- **What matters are being discussed at the meeting?** (including Council, Cabinet, Committees, Subs, Joint Committees and Joint Subs); or
- If you are a Cabinet Member making decisions other than in Cabinet **what matter is before you for single member decision?**



Does the business to be transacted at the meeting

- relate to; or
- likely to affect

any of your registered interests and in particular any of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interests?

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests shall include your interests or those of:

- your spouse or civil partner's
- a person you are living with as husband/ wife
- a person you are living with as if you were civil partners

where you are aware that this other person has the interest.

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What is a Non-Pecuniary interest? – this is an interest which is not pecuniary (as defined) but is nonetheless so significant that a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard to be so significant that it would materially impact upon your judgement of the public interest.

Pecuniary

If the interest is not already in the register you must (unless the interest has been agreed by the Monitoring Officer to be sensitive) disclose the existence and nature of the interest to the meeting

If the Interest is not entered in the register and is not the subject of a pending notification you must within 28 days notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest for inclusion in the register

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Non- pecuniary

Declare the nature and extent of your interest including enough detail to allow a member of the public to understand its nature



You may participate and vote in the usual way but you should seek advice on Predetermination and Bias from the Monitoring Officer.

Our Vision and Priorities for Thurrock

An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future.

1. **People** – a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay
 - High quality, consistent and accessible public services which are right first time
 - Build on our partnerships with statutory, community, voluntary and faith groups to work together to improve health and wellbeing
 - Communities are empowered to make choices and be safer and stronger together
2. **Place** – a heritage-rich borough which is ambitious for its future
 - Roads, houses and public spaces that connect people and places
 - Clean environments that everyone has reason to take pride in
 - Fewer public buildings with better services
3. **Prosperity** – a borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations
 - Attractive opportunities for businesses and investors to enhance the local economy
 - Vocational and academic education, skills and job opportunities for all
 - Commercial, entrepreneurial and connected public services

Minutes of the Meeting of the Hidden and Extreme Harms Prevention Committee held on 2 November 2021 at 7.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Gary Collins (Chair), Alex Anderson (Vice-Chair), Qaisar Abbas, Bukky Okunade, Shane Ralph and Elizabeth Rigby (*arrived 7.04pm*)
- In attendance:** Michelle Cunningham, Community Safety Partnership Manager
Luke Froment, Children Looked After Service Manager
Naintara Khosla, Strategic Lead – Looked After Children and Aftercare
Fran Leddra, Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult Social Care
Jason Read, Youth Offending Operations Manager
Cheryl Wells, Strategic Lead – Community Safety, Emergency Planning, and Resilience
Lucy Tricker, Senior Democratic Services Officer
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Before the start of the meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being recorded, with the video recording to be made available on the Council's website.

1. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared.

3. Essex Police: Verbal Update

The Committee were informed that due to the rescheduling of the meeting, Essex Police were unable to attend and present their verbal update. The Chair stated that they would be invited to the next meeting to present an update.

4. Thurrock Council's Response to Modern Day Slavery and Human Trafficking

The Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult Social Care introduced the report and stated that it provided a high-level strategic view of the Council's position on modern day slavery (MDS) and human trafficking. She stated that under the 2015 Modern Day Slavery Act both MDS and human trafficking had been consolidated to ensure increased support and protection for victims. She explained that MDS was the illegal exploitation of people for reasons of sex, forced labour, and in some extreme cases organ harvesting. She added that MDS could happen to people of any

age, gender or race, and included human trafficking, which was the coercive movement of people using threats and violence. The Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult Social Care explained that Thurrock had an MDS strategy and action plan in place, and helped train people on how to spot MDS and how to respond. She added that Thurrock were also part of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), which helped identify victims of MDS and human trafficking, and offer them the appropriate support. She highlighted that in 2020/21 no adults had been referred through the NRM to Thurrock. The Youth Offending Operations Manager stated that four children had been referred through the NRM scheme, but these were due to criminal exploitation rather than MDS or human trafficking. She stated that Thurrock was best placed to understand how MDS and human trafficking could affect people, for example Thurrock had coped with the incident in October 2019 when 39 people had been found dead in a lorry in Purfleet, and had helped bring about criminal convictions for human trafficking for the perpetrators. She added that following the tragic death of those 39 people, Thurrock had become part of Operation Melrose and Operation Bluebird, which were multiagency operations including the Council, police and Port Watch. She highlighted point 2.5 of the report which outlined the improvements that had been borne from these operations.

The Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult Social Care then moved on and highlighted point 2.8 of the report, which outlined Thurrock's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy. She outlined appendix 4 of the report which showed Thurrock's Council's new MDS Statement, and whilst not compulsory, was in line with government best practice. She stated that point 3.1 of the report highlighted the Local Government Association (LGA) guidance for Councillors dealing with MDS, including how to improve understanding and supporting victims. She stated that this was broken down into sections such as: identification; support; and disruption. She summarised and stated that the next steps for the team were carrying out an audit into Council staff understanding of MDS and trialling a newsletter for partners highlighting MDS.

Councillor Anderson highlighted point 2.5 on page 133 of the agenda, where the report highlighted that increased partnership working had been achieved through partner meetings. He queried how these meetings had increased communication. The Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult Social Care replied that the meetings had been productive as different agencies had been able to meet and share intelligence. The Community Safety Partnership Manager added that the meetings brought together different agencies that, before Operation Melrose, did not usually meet, for example immigration, ports, and local police teams. She explained that these meetings helped identify local patterns in MDS and human trafficking, and targeted actions were put into place using joint operations and police officers who were dedicated to areas of potential MDS, such as the ports, certain local roads, and Moto services at Lakeside. She stated that these operations had led to both criminal charges and civil penalties, and had improved the risk management response to MDS and human trafficking, as well as improving the work of local immigration teams. Councillor Anderson

felt it was good to hear that multiagency working was occurring. He added that the Nationality and Borders Bill was currently progressing through parliament, and asked if Thurrock had been invited to take part in the consultation process for this. The Strategic Lead Looked After Children and Aftercare replied that the consultation for this Bill had been surrounding Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) and similar prevalent issues in England. She stated that Thurrock had provided feedback as part of this consultation, which had highlighted the criminality aspects of trafficked young people, and the problems of some UASC presenting as younger than their real age.

Councillor Ralph thanked officers for their report and queried which MDS and human trafficking issues were specific to Thurrock, for example human trafficking for car washes. The Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult Social Care explained that this report provided a high-level strategic overview as this was the first Committee meeting, but a report detailing specific Thurrock problems regarding MDS could be provided at a later meeting. She explained that the team were aware and involved with cases of human trafficking in places such as car washes, nail bars and takeaways. She added that the team were monitoring certain locations, had sent out notices, and were undertaking inspections when needed. Councillor Ralph then highlighted appendix 3 which covered VAWG, but did not specify MDS and human trafficking problems for men and boys, such as human trafficking for work in car washes and takeaways. The Community Safety Partnership Manager replied and explained that when the Modern Day Slavery and Human Trafficking strategy had been developed, it had been a standalone strategy, and it had been difficult to keep engagement and momentum with the action plan. She added that as Thurrock were a small authority, with a small team, there had not been the officer capacity to continue with this as a standalone strategy, so it had had to be moved under the VAWG umbrella. She understood that VAWG was only a small part of human trafficking, but appendix 3 covered all types of MDS, including violence against men and boys. The Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult Social Care added that the action plan did include all genders, ages, and races, but she would take back the comment to the team. Councillor Ralph asked if the title could be changed to include violence against men and boys. The Community Safety Partnership Manager explained that VAWG was in line with and formed part of a national strategy. She explained that violence against men and boys was included in the strategy, which had been updated in October 2021 by the Home Office.

Councillor Abbas highlighted point 2.5 of the report and asked if the increased partnership working between organisations had had an impact on MDS, such as an increased number of prosecutions, or a reduction in the number of victims of MDS. The Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult Social Care stated that this information would only be known by the police, but would need to remain confidential due to ongoing investigations. She stated that awareness of MDS and human trafficking had increased because of the partnership working, which had subsequently led to more training for appropriate partner colleagues.

The Chair queried how many people had been freed from MDS in the past 12 months. The Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult Social Care replied that no adults had been referred through the NRM in 2020/21. The Chair then questioned how awareness had been raised, and if the Day of Anti-Slavery on 18 October 2021 had been publicised. The Community Safety Partnership Manager replied that the Day of Anti-Slavery had been publicised through social media this year, but last year a billboard and high street stall had been erected to highlight the signs of MDS and human trafficking, and encourage people to report any suspicious activity. She added that Thurrock had begun a local campaign in 2019 with Crimestoppers, but following the death of 39 people in Purfleet, this became a national campaign including the Home Office, which had focussed on lorry drivers and MDS, rather than community awareness. She explained that post-COVID the team were working on social media campaigns to highlight MDS and human trafficking to the local community.

Councillor Abbas then questioned what was meant by officers working towards a 'hostile environment' for the perpetrators of MDS and human trafficking in Thurrock. The Community Safety Partnership Manager responded that it meant Thurrock officers and other agencies were stopping people at the point of entry, thus ensuring that traffickers did not want to operate in Thurrock. The Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult Social Care added that the Adult Safeguarding team were experienced in dealing with MDS and human trafficking, and could thoroughly investigate MDS concerns. She explained that in 2020/21 no referrals had been made through the NRM, but safeguarding cases were steadily increasing this year due to the reduction of COVID restrictions. The Strategic Lead Looked After Children and Aftercare added that the team would work to ensure victims of MDS and human trafficking were supported and not treated as criminals, for example they would not be arrested; would be provided with a social worker; and given homes where appropriate. She explained that Operation Melrose had increased the profile of MDS and human trafficking, and therefore made it more difficult for traffickers to operate in Thurrock and the wider Essex area.

Councillor Rigby questioned if more human trafficking cases were being seen due to the reduction of travel restrictions. The Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult Social Care replied that during COVID the team had seen evidence of human trafficking and MDS going underground, as less people were coming through the border and more checks were being made. She stated that the team had seen increased examples of exploitation online, or the problem materialising in different ways, which had been discussed during a recent MDS summit held by the Prime Minister.

The Chair moved the debate onto appendix 4 of the report on page 191 of the agenda, and asked if Members had any comment on the draft MDS Statement. Councillor Ralph felt that it covered all of the necessary teams, for example social services, trading standards, and licensing. Councillor Okunade

questioned who would be the reader of the statement. The Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult Social Care replied that it would be the mission statement of the Council, and provided partners and the public with the Council's statement of intent regarding MDS and human trafficking. Councillor Abbas queried if it was Thurrock Council's responsibility to ensure businesses complied with the Statement, and if awareness would be raised with businesses and contractors. He also asked if the Statement would be reviewed annually. The Community Safety Partnership Manager replied that the Council needed to adopt the Statement first before going out to businesses. She added that it would be reviewed annually.

Councillor Rigby asked if violence against men and boys could be included in point 3 of the Statement, where violence against women and girls was discussed, to ensure men and boys were not excluded. The Community Safety Partnership Manager replied that the VAWG name could not be changed as it was a national strategy, but that men and boys would not be excluded. Councillor Rigby highlighted the Work Programme for December, and queried if the report on Violence against Men and Boys would be a discussion, rather than a strategy. The Community Safety Partnership Manager replied that Violence against Men and Boys was not a strategy, but could be a topic for discussion. Councillor Abbas asked if a paragraph, or wording, could be added to the statement to ensure men and boys were included. The Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult Social Care replied that she would take this away for consideration. Councillor Anderson highlighted appendix 4 and felt it was good to see procurement processes being included as part of MDS, to ensure that slave labour would not be used to produce items used by Thurrock Council.

The Chair summarised and stated that the MDS Statement needed to look outward into the community, rather than looking inward at the work being undertaken by Thurrock Council. He felt that the current draft of the MDS Statement was passive, and wanted to see it become more active, for example by suggesting the boycott of businesses that used MDS and forced labour. He highlighted section three of the Statement and felt that violence against men and boys should be included alongside violence against women and girls. The Committee agreed that they could not support recommendation two until the necessary changes had been made to the Council's MDS Statement. The Committee also agreed upon a quarterly report on MDS to ensure the Council were monitoring and fulfilling its MDS plans.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

1. Scrutinised and assured themselves of the response to Modern Day Slavery (MDS) and human trafficking in Thurrock Council.

2. Agreed a quarterly report through the annual work plan for the monitoring of identified actions, to ensure that the Council fulfils its plans in relation to the Modern Day Slavery Act 2015.

The Principal Social Worker and Strategic Lead Safeguarding and Adult

Social Care left the meeting at 7.57pm

5. Thurrock Council's Response to Criminal Gang Activity

The Youth Offending Operations Manager introduced the report and stated that it provided an overview of Thurrock's response to criminal gang activity in the borough. He stated that in this context gang meant people that saw themselves as a defined group; laid claim over specific territory, either geographically or relating to specific drugs; and were in conflict with another gang. He stated that recently, county lines operations had been receiving increased national press, and explained that this was a business model used by gangs to deal drugs, that exploited children and trafficked them to sell drugs in a certain area. He stated that most of the children that had been referred through the NRM process, had been referred due to their participation in county lines drug activity or were being exploited locally. He explained that criminal gang activity also included knife crime and serious youth violence. He explained that in 2019, the Home Office had identified and provided funding for the 18 worst affected knife crime areas, which included Essex. He added that this funding had been used to set up the Essex Violence and Vulnerability Unit (EVVU), whose three aims had been to: reduce hospital admissions for knife wounds for those aged under 25; reduce knife violence for those aged under 25; and reduce homicides from knives for those aged under 25. The Youth Offending Operations Manager explained that the EVVU had begun this work by trying to identify criminal gangs, and had worked in partnership with local communities and local authorities. He explained that this process had identified young people at risk from exploitation by gangs, and had helped them to leave.

The Youth Offending Operations Manager moved on and stated that Thurrock Council had written a report in 2020 on serious youth violence, which was based on a public health approach to gangs that had been used successfully to reduce knife crime in cities such as Glasgow. He stated that it used a similar long-term model as used for tackling COVID, based on surveillance; primary prevention; secondary prevention; and tertiary prevention. He moved on and explained that the EVVU had set up the Violence and Vulnerability Board (VVB), which was chaired by the Essex Fire and Crime Commissioner and had received funding for Thurrock to be able to spend locally. He stated that the VVB were focussed on safeguarding children, as well as vulnerable adults, for example by protecting them from cuckooing, which was a process whereby a drug dealer would set up shop in the house of a vulnerable adult and traffic children to that house for drug activity. He stated that the majority of children used in county lines and cuckooing were involved in the distribution of class-A drugs such as crack and heroin, and the VVB had worked with Essex Police to identify local hotspots and undertake a criminal justice approach. He commented that the team had also used in-depth data to triangulate those children most at risk from exploitation by gangs, such as children in need and children with special needs. He explained that the team used a programme called Xantura to gather this data alongside other agencies and partners.

The Youth Offending Operations Manager added that the team were currently trying to raise awareness of criminal gang activity in schools, for example the Youth Offending Service had a dedicated team member that collaborated with schools. He explained that they undertook curriculum based work in primary and secondary schools, as well as local colleges; provided leaflets for parents; and leaflets for professionals in schools. He stated that the Brighter Futures team also provided teaching for parents whose children were at risk from gang exploitation. He stated that these programmes had increased the reach of the Youth Offending Service and provided detached youth workers, who were funded through the VVB, and worked in criminal gang hotspots to prevent the exploitation of children. He explained that the Youth Offending team had also delivered online roadshows for the past two years for Years 4, 5, and 6, which had been offered to all schools in Thurrock. He added that the roadshows had been based on a presentation to help students understand criminal gang activity and exploitation. He explained that the VVB had also provided funding for St Stevens, which were a charity that undertook outreach work in West Thurrock and South Stifford, as well as working with the detached youth workers.

The Youth Offending Operations Manager moved on and explained how the team had developed a Schools Policy on Knife Crime that was implemented when a young person in school was found with a knife in their possession and worked to try and avoid exclusion. He explained that a risk assessment was undertaken and the police would intervene where necessary with the child, their family and the school. He stated that the Pupil Referral Units (PRU) could be hotspots for exploitation, and the Schools Policy on Knife Crime aimed to keep children in mainstream schooling where appropriate. He added that the Youth Offending Service worked closely with the Olive Academy to prevent students being exploited by criminal gangs.

Councillor Ralph thanked officers for their work on the report, and asked how confident the team were that they would continue to receive funding from the VVB. The Youth Offending Operations Manager replied that funding would be received until March 2022, and the team were currently working with Essex on ensuring future funding was agreed, to embed the work that had been undertaken locally. He explained that although funding in future would not be as high as was currently being received, the VVB were working with the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner to ensure the highest levels of funding would be granted. He added that the EVVU would also be able to choose how to spend funding locally, for example they would use surveillance to determine areas most in need, and would partner with the police to ensure funding would be spent in the right places. The Youth Offending Operations Manager added that the team were also providing training to various teams in the Council, such as the Cleaner and Greener team, as well as running local community training sessions, to increase awareness of criminal gang activity. Councillor Ralph then asked how the team worked to identify children that were at risk of being exploited by gangs, particularly those children that displayed no other identifiable criteria, such as being a child in need. The Youth Offending Operations Manager replied that the team provided 'Know the Signs' training

for schools and parents, which included if their child was going missing more often, their school attendance was decreasing, they had access to more money, and were buying more expensive items such as clothes and games consoles. He stated that Thurrock had its own specialist Missing Panel, which worked with the police to find children who had gone missing.

Councillor Abbas thanked the team for their work on the report, and felt impressed by appendix 2 of the report. He asked how the team were currently delivering leaflets. The Youth Offending Operations Manager replied that leaflets were being delivered to vulnerable groups, such as children identified by the Youth Offending Service, children being monitored through safeguarding processes, and children in need. He explained that leaflets were also used to target parents whose child was at risk of gang exploitation, and online training for parents could also be provided. Councillor Abbas highlighted appendix 1 of the report, and asked how the public health approach to tackling serious youth violence would be implemented. The Youth Offending Operations Manager responded that it was a statutory duty for the Director of Public Health to publish a report, and the public health approach to serious youth violence was currently regarded as the best approach. He explained that it was a long-term process, but would meet the need of the local community.

Councillor Anderson stated that in recent years, an injunction had been brought against members of the C17 gang, and asked if this had been an effective tool against gang members. He queried if this process of injunctions would be used against other gangs in future. The Youth Offending Operations Manager explained that funding had been provided to the Community Safety Partnership, who were currently working with the police to gather evidence against a new gang and bring appropriate action, which could include an injunction. He added that the C17 gang injunction had been funded through Thurrock Council, and had gone through a long process in the civil court to be granted. He explained that an injunction could only be passed based on the balance of probability, and therefore lots of evidence needed to be collected before it could go to court. He explained that the C17 gang injunction had received lots of attention from the national press due to its success, and was now being used more widely, for example by Southend-on-Sea Borough Council.

Councillor Okunade felt it was good to hear about the Schools Policy on Knife Crime, and asked if schools were cooperating with the policy. She also asked if children were reoffending after the policy had been used. The Youth Offending Operations Manager replied that the Schools Policy on Knife Crime had been adopted by the Council in April 2020, and to date four children had been kept in mainstream schooling because of the policy. He felt that the schools had become more cooperative, partly because OFSTED had changed their messaging regarding knife crime. He felt that it was early days for the Schools Policy on Knife Crime, but schools were adopting and using the policy. He added that funding was also being provided to the Olive Academy to provide specific re-integration workers so children could return to mainstream schools when appropriate. The Youth Offending Operations

Manager felt that a holistic approach was being taken by all partners on all levels to reduce knife crime and criminal gang activity in Thurrock.

Councillor Rigby asked what direct contact the team were having with children at risk of exploitation by gangs. The Youth Offending Operations Manager replied that the team could either work directly with specific children at risk of exploitation, or could provide a more general approach to whole year groups in primary or secondary schools. He stated that the team approached every school in Thurrock at the beginning of the academic year to offer them training sessions with the children, as well as post-16 education settings such as SEEVIC and Palmers. The Chair questioned how the team were working to combat anti-police messaging disseminated through drill music over social media. The Youth Offending Operations Manager replied that both national and local governments were finding it hard to tackle issues occurring over social media. He stated that the team encourages children to make music, as it was an important creative outlet, but tried to focus the music on a more positive message.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- 1. Assured themselves of the response by Thurrock Council to address criminal gang activity in Thurrock.**
- 2. Contributed to the delivery of this agenda, ensuring that communities have a voice within this agenda.**
- 3. Agreed an annual report on the work of the Violence and Vulnerability Board to address criminal gang activity in Thurrock be brought to the Committee.**

6. Thurrock Council's Response to Prevent Duty 2015

The Community Safety Partnership Manager introduced the report and stated that the Council's Prevent duty was outlined in the 2015 Counterterrorism Act, and Members would be asked to scrutinise Thurrock's response to Prevent and help to improve services. She stated that the national current threat level was classed as substantial, which meant that a terrorist attack was likely. She explained that the threat level had remained the same after the tragic death of Sir David Amess MP, as although it was being treated as a terrorist incident, there was no specific threat to the wider UK. She stated that the LGA self-assessment was included at appendix two of the report, and helped local authorities mitigate threats. She explained that Thurrock also had its own Channel Panel that assisted people who were vulnerable to terrorism, and appendix 3 of the report contained Thurrock's annual self-assessment. She stated that counterterrorism had been a priority of the Community Safety Partnership in 2021, and would likely continue to be a priority in 2022, alongside the local Prevent Strategy which had been developed and consulted on with the Prevent Working Group.

The Community Safety Partnership Manager explained that the Prevent self-assessment worked using a Red, Amber, and Green rating system and had found seven green criteria and three amber criteria. She explained that one of the amber criteria related to the Prevent training programme, which had moved online since the onset of COVID. She explained that although the team had received positive feedback on the training, there was currently no needs assessment in place which would ensure the training was reaching the right people and being undertaken correctly. She added that now the training was online there was no system to be able to monitor who completed it. The Community Safety Partnership Manager added that the Home Office were currently renewing the training offer, but all Thurrock schools had somebody trained and accredited in Prevent, in line with the Section 157 safeguarding assessment. She explained that the next amber criteria related to venue hire. She commented that a policy regarding Prevent and venue hire had been adopted by Thurrock Council and sent to schools, and a policy regarding venue hire and community buildings was currently being drafted. The Community Safety Partnership Manager stated that the final amber criteria related to community engagement with Prevent, as she felt this area could always be improved upon.

The Community Safety Partnership Manager added that Thurrock was a non-funded Prevent Council, but the national Prevent scheme had now begun to provide local Prevent advisors, who would develop communications with stakeholders and would help include Prevent in the Local Plan. She summarised and stated that the Channel Panel assessment was also being updated to include new processes and ensure all vulnerable people were appropriately supported.

Councillor Anderson stated that the murderer of Sir David Amess MP had been reported to Prevent and had worked with the Channel Panel. He asked what was being done to ensure people continued to be monitored once they had completed the Channel Panel process. The Youth Offending Operations Manager replied that he sat on the Channel Panel and explained that people were subject to a six and twelve month review once they had completed the process. He stated that once they had completed the process, they were linked with positive resources in the community to reduce risk as much as possible. He stated that at the twelve month review, the person was provided with a clear exit strategy and continuing support where necessary. Councillor Anderson questioned if people completing Channel Panel were paired with a role model at the end of the process. The Youth Offending Operations Manager replied that people who completed Channel Panel were linked to positive role models within their community who could provide an ongoing support network, for example people referred to Channel Panel because of Islamic extremism were linked with positive Mosques and Imams; and people referred to Channel Panel because of right wing extremism were linked to relevant positive organisations for support.

Councillor Okunade left the meeting at 8.50pm

Councillor Abbas highlighted the risk assessment at appendix 2 of the report,

and queried how the Council would work with local for hire venues to ensure they met the Prevent duty. The Community Safety Partnership Manager replied that during COVID venue hire had been immaterial because of government restrictions, so the Council had focussed on Prevent in schools. She stated that currently the venue hire process in relation to Prevent for Council buildings and schools, had been finalised and agreed, but this process still needed finalising for community venues such as village halls. She explained that community venues could not be forced to adopt the Prevent venue hire policy, but could be advised and encouraged. Councillor Abbas then questioned how effective the Prevent system was at countering terrorism. The Community Safety Partnership Manager replied that an independent review into Prevent was currently underway, and some findings were being pre-empted, which was why local Prevent advisors were being established. She highlighted that Thurrock was not a Prevent funded area, but had completed the Prevent self-assessment. She added that the Prevent system had learnt lots of lessons from incidents such as the Parsons Green bombing, and worked with the Channel Panels to ensure all Prevent recommendations were being fulfilled. She explained that Thurrock were currently undertaking an audit of cases that had gone through Channel Panel, and children identified as at risk of going through Channel Panel to ensure that all steps were being undertaken. The Youth Offending Operations Manager added that the team were ensuring all the necessary checks had been carried out. He explained that the Channel Panel had thousands of successful interventions across the country, but this was negated by the handful of unsuccessful cases that were reported extensively in the media.

Councillor Ralph asked how the team were working to educate young people against extreme beliefs, particularly at college and university level. The Community Safety Partnership Manager replied that the Education Safeguarding Forum had been briefed today and resources for schools shared, including education against extremism for those aged under 16 called Educate Against Hate. She stated that resources for schools, such as lesson plans and information for parents, was also available through the Lets Talk About It website. She mentioned that representatives from Palmers College and South Essex College also sat on the Prevent Board and attended seminars on how to have a conversation with young people about terrorism.

The Chair thanked the team for their work and questioned why left-wing extremism was not discussed as part of the Prevent strategy. The Community Safety Partnership Manager replied that the team received quarterly briefings that outlined current Prevent issues that directed and dictated the strategy. She stated that the latest focus was surrounding Incels, which was now included as part of the local strategy. She explained that the briefings did not currently include left-wing extremism and therefore were not included as part of the strategy.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

1. Scrutinised and assured themselves of the response to the self-assessment audit completed using the Local Government Association

Toolkit and provided for scrutiny at Appendix 2.

2. Scrutinised and assured themselves of the response to the Channel Panel self-assessment completed in April 2021 and provided for scrutiny at Appendix 3.

3. Agreed a process through the annual work plan for monitoring of identified actions to ensure Thurrock Council fulfils its duty in relation to Prevent.

The Youth Offending Operations Manager left the meeting at 9.08pm

7. Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers: Introductory Report

The Strategic Lead Looked After Children and Aftercare introduced the report and stated that Thurrock Council had a responsibility to UASC as part of the Looked After Children and care-leavers service. She explained that each local authority in the UK was allocated to take UASC equal to 0.07% of their total population by the government, which equated to 31 children in Thurrock. She highlighted that the actual number of children accepted into Thurrock could fluctuate above and below this number depending on a variety of factors. She stated that UASC travelled from their home countries, such as Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan, without a responsible adult and were under the age of 18 applying for asylum. She stated that sometimes children travelled on their own, or with a sibling, and were often trafficked. She stated that the team had to assess whether a UASC had been trafficked or were refugees.

The Strategic Lead Looked After Children and Aftercare commented that there were numerous points of entry for UASC in Thurrock, although the preferred point of entry was in Dover. She stated that this meant Council's in Kent took a disproportionately large number of UASCs, and had led to the government introducing the National Transfer Scheme, that meant UASC could be allocated to a different part of the country to their point of entry, and ensured all Councils were meeting their allocation target. She stated that accepting an UASC was not a statutory duty for a local authority, and required cooperation between different local authorities.

The Strategic Lead Looked After Children and Aftercare explained that when a child entered the UK they were required to provide their age. She stated that this could often be difficult as some children did not know their date of birth, or would lie to make themselves younger than their actual age. She stated that if there was debate surrounding their age, or they looked over 25, then an age assessment would be undertaken by an accredited person following Home Officer guidance. She stated that younger UASC were often trafficked for MDS, and Thurrock worked closely with the police to ensure best practice was being followed and all safeguarding criterion were met. She stated that Thurrock's social work team would work quickly to build trust and rapport with a trafficked child who could be vulnerable to further trafficking issues.

Councillor Anderson questioned the current process regarding age assessments, and if this was due to be updated in the future. The Strategic Lead Looked After Children and Aftercare responded that all UASC would be treated as children unless clearly over 18. She explained that immigration workers would have a conversation with the UASC, for example would ask questions about their schooling or work history to determine their age. She stated that if a UASC was determined to be older than 18 then they would not be accommodated and would work with immigration officials. Councillor Anderson questioned if there would be future reform, for example the use of dental x-rays to determine a person's age. The Strategic Lead Looked After Children and Aftercare replied that there were no proposed changes, but a new Bill was being taken through Parliament that related to older migrants. She explained that a consultation was taking place on the new Bill, but that it was a contentious area. She highlighted that only experienced social workers would undertake age assessments and the interviews were highly technical. She commented that there was currently some pushback regarding using dental x-rays to determine age, as this could be subject to a legal challenge. She stated that every age assessment went through two layers of social work expertise and a risk assessment was carried out on every UASC.

Councillor Ralph questioned how effective the team were at tracking missing UASC. The Strategic Lead Looked After Children and Aftercare replied that missing UASC were tracked through regular UASC meetings, but the responsibility to find a missing person was with the police. She stated that the team would make sure all the necessary agencies, such as the police, the Home Office, and immigration were aware if any UASC went missing.

The Chair stated due to the time limit of the venue, the rest of the discussion on the item would need to be deferred to the next appropriate Committee meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

1. Noted the work of officers in relation to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) presenting to Thurrock.

2. Are aware Corporate Parenting Responsibilities extend to (UASC)

8. Work Programme

The Committee agreed that the following items be added to the Work Programme:

1. The deferred discussion regarding UASC
2. Hate crime and social media
3. Violence against men and boys

The meeting finished at 9.30 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**

| | | |
|---|--|-----------------------------|
| 16 December 2021 (continued from 2 November 2021 meeting) | | ITEM: 5 |
| Hidden and Extreme Harms Prevention Committee | | |
| Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers: Introductory Report | | |
| Wards and communities affected: All | | Key Decision: N/A |
| Report of: Naintara Khosla, Strategic Lead, Looked After Children and Aftercare | | |
| Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon, Interim Assistant Director, Childrens Social Care | | |
| Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services | | |
| This report is Public | | |

Executive Summary

This report updates committee members on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking (UASC) children looked after by Thurrock Council. Corporate Parenting responsibilities are inclusive of UASC who are a subset of the Children Looked After. Good corporate parents, just like all good parents, need to understand and know what is happening to their children and young people.

Local Authorities are allocated UASC in line with 0.07% of their total child population, which for Thurrock is 31 children. This is to ensure a fair distribution of the responsibility for looking after unaccompanied children. As of the 31 July 2021, 3 of the 31 UASC currently open to Thurrock are considered to be, long term missing children.

1. Recommendations:

1.1 That Members of the Committee note the work of officers in relation to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children presenting to Thurrock.

1.2 Members are aware Corporate Parenting Responsibilities extend to UASC.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children arrive in the United Kingdom often following a long and dangerous journey where they may have been at risk of various types of abuse and exploitation, which can often leave them traumatised. A UASC is a person below the age of 18 who arrives in the UK

who has no adult with responsibility for their care. This includes minors who are left unaccompanied when they have entered the UK and is a person who:

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

A child who is outside his/her country of origin and separated from their Primary carer may:

- be on their own
- have come with a relative who abandons them
- have been sent away by parents for their own safety
- have been trafficked

2.2 Local Authorities across the country have the task of receiving these children, identifying who they are, identifying their specific needs and ensuring that appropriate support is offered to keep them safe; solidify their legal and immigration status and help them to settle into their new circumstances, achieve in education or training and reach their potential.

2.3 Given established transport links, unaccompanied asylum seeking children are more likely to enter into the country through a limited pool of Local Authorities. Thurrock is one such point of entry due to its geographical location, two established ports and busy motorway services. There has been a reduction in the entry of UASC into Essex Ports during 2020 as the preferred route has been through Dover into Kent. In order for equitable distribution of UASC arrivals Central Government have implemented the National Transfer Scheme (NTS).

2.4 The NTS aims to ensure that UASC receive the support and accommodation they need whilst delivering a fairer and more equitable distribution of responsibility for UASC across the UK. Supporting UASC is a shared national responsibility, and it is only right that all local authorities and areas of the UK play their part. The new NTS is designed to address barriers and encourage increased participation in the scheme. The scheme is unlikely to impact significantly on Thurrock because it is a Port of Entry and usually have a population of UASC that meets or exceeds the expected allocation of 0.07%. The NTS impacts directly on those local authorities who need to increase their UASC looked after children population to be 0.07% of the total child population.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Brief Enquiry

When an unaccompanied minor child enters the UK seeking asylum, some will have their age disputed by the authorities, and will have to be subject to an age assessment.

Almost all of these children have no form of identification, having fled war torn countries. They have no way of proving their age with documentary evidence. In some cultures they do not celebrate birthdays and birthdays are not considered an important milestones.

It is important that social workers have considered the cultural background of the individual child and that the ordeal to which these children are subjected could 'age' them more than a child of their age not subjected to these circumstances.

At point of entry all UASC individuals are subject to a 'brief enquiry to age'. This is a brief assessment in accordance with the guidance for assessing age. Anyone claiming to be a child but whose physical appearance and demeanor strongly suggests that they are significantly over 18 will be treated from that point onwards as an adult. The brief enquiry to age is undertaken by a qualified social worker and with the use of an interpreter.

3.2 Age Assessments

Full Merton compliant age assessments are undertaken on any UASC where there is a dispute about their age.

In order for an age assessment to be valid, it must comply with what is commonly referred to as the age assessment being "Merton Compliant". These guidelines were devised by Judge Stanley Burnton in the case of *B v Merton LBC* which was subject to Judicial Review (JR) and relates to a case in which the local authority had determined that a young person claiming asylum was aged at least 18. On that basis, he was not a child and the local authority owed him no duty under the Children Act 1989.

The guidelines state that in a case where age is not clear, and no reliable documentary evidence exists, the credibility of the applicant, physical appearance and behaviour must be assessed. The assessment must also include general background of the applicant, including ethnic and cultural considerations, family circumstances, education and history over the past few years.

When making a decision to undertake an assessment of age, it is important to establish whether it is absolutely necessary to complete an assessment. Statutory guidance on the care of unaccompanied children states that an assessment should be carried out only where there is significant reason to doubt that the claimant is a child. An age assessment should not be a routine part of a Local Authority assessment of unaccompanied or trafficked children and should be limited to the minimum necessary to ensure that the child/Young

Person receives the appropriate services and educational support for their age and development.

Home Office policy is to apply the age assessment policy in such a way as to guard against the detention of children generally including accidental detention of someone believed to be an adult but subsequently found to be a child. Detention can have a significant and negative impact on a child's mental or physical health and development and can be extremely frightening. The effect of not being believed and being detained can be very stressful and demoralising and there are serious safeguarding risks detaining UASC alongside adults.

The Home Office as part of the relaunch of the NTS are supporting Local Authorities to complete age assessments making experienced staff and training available to social workers. Childrens Services can also commission Age Assessment training for social workers, as necessary, to ensure there is a small pool of social workers able to undertake age assessments.

3.3 Managing Human Trafficking and Child Exploitation

Human trafficking, human exploitation and modern slavery are alarmingly widespread issues in today's society. Thousands of children and adults are exploited each year for cheap or unpaid labour, sexual abuse or domestic servitude, which can have a devastating impact on their physical and mental wellbeing.

Modern Slavery is defined as the recruitment, movement, harbouring or receiving of children, women or men through the use of force, coercion, and abuse of vulnerability, deception or other means for the purpose of exploitation. It is a crime under the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and includes holding a person in a position of slavery, servitude forced or compulsory labour, or facilitating their travel with the intention of exploiting them soon after.

Modern Slavery involves the exploitation of Humans for commercial gain. Modern Slavery is where people are controlled and become entrapped making our clothes, serving our food, picking our crops, working in factories, harvesting drugs or working in houses as cooks, cleaners or nannies.

In recognition to the Modern Slavery Threat, 'Operation Innerste', a national, good practice, multi-agency response, is in place to improve the safeguarding of unaccompanied migrant children. Thurrock are working with Essex Police, Border Force and Immigration to implement the Operation Innerste model locally since September 2020. The overall aim is to maximise the effectiveness of professionals and their initial meeting with UASC. Professionals should be focused on building early rapport and recording the young person's identity information, prior to referral onto Childrens Social Care. It recognises and emphasises the importance of the positive early interactions with professionals in reducing the influence of traffickers. Operation Innerste is key to reducing the

likelihood of young people being re-trafficked or going missing once in the care of the Local Authority.

Before any child comes into the care of Thurrock, biometrics (finger prints and photographs) are taken for each child by the Police or Immigration. This is done for a number of reasons but primarily it ensures that should they go missing then the likelihood of them being identified and safeguarded is increased; this also acts as an inhibitor to traffickers. A biometrics record makes the child less appealing to potential exploiters as the child has a footprint within the UK intelligence systems. The ethos of Operation Innerste is to consider that all UASC are potential victims of trafficking and placed under Police Powers of Protection. This has crucially meant that arresting young people is avoided and those initial foundations of a trusting relationship have been created.

In Thurrock, Children's Social Care, we recognise the significance of forming a significant relationship to create trust and ensuring that all UASC are provided with a place of safety from which they can express themselves and allow for their needs to be addressed. This provides an environment to support disclosure about their potential trafficking experiences. All UASC are assessed by a social worker, so that they can be appropriately accommodated. A follow up visit is undertaken by the social worker within 48 hours as part of the ongoing assessment process. Social work intervention focuses on UASC being recognised as vulnerable children and young people who may be subject to Modern Slavery as a result of being trafficked.

There have been 30 new arrivals where a UASC has been able to have the protection of Operation Innerste procedures, as at 30 June 2021. Since the introduction of Operation Innerste (September 2021), 2 new arrivals have gone missing on a long term basis. In these cases there has been a formal decision in a multi-agency strategy meeting that all local lines of enquiry have been exhausted in seeking to locate the young person. Since the introduction of Operation Innerste, the police response to new arrivals has been in-line with safeguarding rather than criminal procedures. No new arrivals managed under Operation Innerste have been missing long term since 01.04.2021. There is one individual who is long term missing since 01.04.21 and the young person was arrested by police for suspicion of vehicle theft with a subsequent referral to Thurrock Childrens Services as it became apparent he was also an Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child.

3.4 Multi Agency Partnership

There is significant partnership working across Thurrock Childrens Social Care, Police, Border Force and Home Office Immigration representatives with a regular 6 weekly Ports Meeting which reviews the issues in relation to illegal immigration, sharing information to reduce organised immigration crime and trafficking.

The Ports Meeting is supplemented with a six weekly UASC Missing Meeting which specifically reviews all those young people who have gone missing since

they became looked after, and where a formal decision has been made within a multi-agency strategy meeting that, “all local lines of enquiry” have been exhausted. In the recent Ofsted Report 2021 they have noted the good practice in relation to the management of missing young people:

‘When unaccompanied young people go missing for prolonged periods, they are kept under review. In line with good practice, staff continue to make efforts to trace their whereabouts and follow up on any sighting leads. Checks are carried out with the National Referral Mechanism, the Home Office and other local authority areas, and new intelligence considered until their whereabouts are known’.

p.3 Ofsted Focused Visit to Thurrock 2021¹

3.5 National Referral Mechanism

A referral to the National Referral Mechanism is required where there is suspicion of Modern Slavery. This is a Government service to ensure information is collated on Modern Slavery which can be analysed and used to prevent and disrupt human exploitation.

Independent Child Trafficking Guardian Offer

Independent Child Trafficking Guardians (ICTGs) are professionals who have recently been recruited to ensure there is independent support for those children who have potentially been trafficked. They work with professionals to support them in recognising and responding to exploitation and trafficking, offering individual case consultation for professionals who are in direct contact with the child, focusing on safeguarding within the context of exploitation; they will also support in referrals to the National Referral Mechanism.

ICTG’s have been working alongside Thurrock social workers in cases where there may be a risk of exploitation. A representative from the ICTG also attends the regular strategy meetings held in relation to the long term missing Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children this supports a joint approach where a child may come to the attention of professionals (police, health, other local authorities and Home Office representatives), following a prolonged period of missing. Where new information comes to light the allocated social worker along with the ICTG take steps to make contact with and meet the young person at the earliest opportunity.

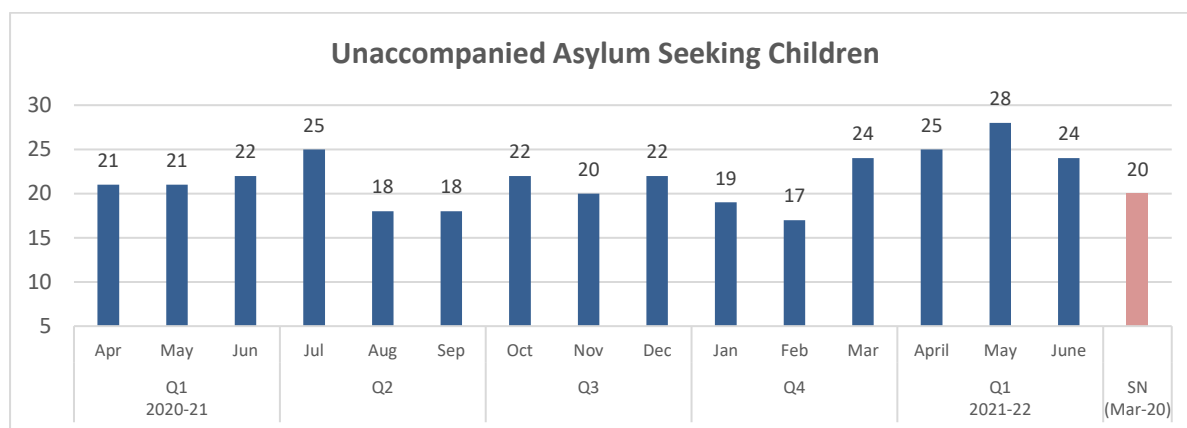
3.6 Performance Data on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

There was a reduction in the entry of UASC into Essex Ports between August 2020 and February 2021 as the preferred route appears to have been through Dover. Between April and June 2021, there were 12 new UASC arrivals into

¹ <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50167523>

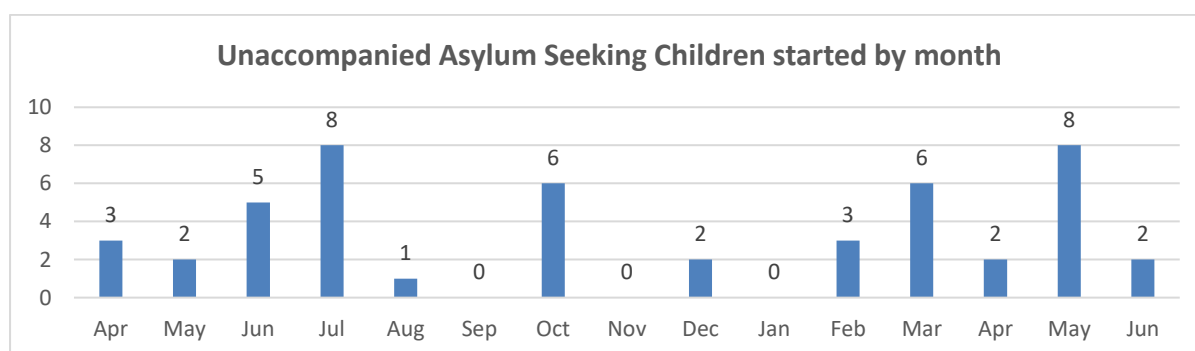
Thurrock. This has increased the CLA cohort of UASC to 24 in Q1 2021-22. Table 1 below reflects the Total Number of UASC for each month in the Period April 2020 to June 2021. There are some small fluctuations, however there has been regular arrivals post February 2021.

Table 1 Total Number of UASC Looked After by Month



3.7 Table 2 below notes the rate of UASC who started to be looked after by Thurrock. Between 01 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, there were 36 UASC episodes started. Of these, three were Afghan, two Algerian, five Eritrean, three Iraqi, one Libyan, one Moroccan, six Sudanese, one Syrian and the remaining 14 mixed or Black African ethnicity. Out of 36 episodes, 91% were of male gender ranging between the ages of 15 to 17 years.

Table 2



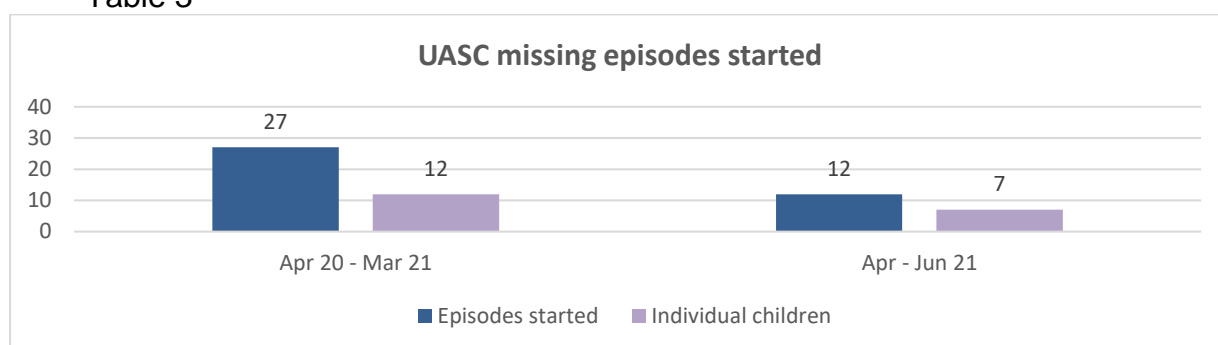
In 2020 there were 10 UASC episodes started between April to June. Between 01 April and 30 June 2021, there were 12 UASC episodes started; of these, one was Albanian, one Eritrean, one Sudanese and the remaining mixed or Black African ethnicity.

Missing UASC

Between 01 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, there 27 missing UASC episodes, these episodes were made up by 12 individual UASC. Of these 12, two were

Algerian, one Eritrean, one Ethiopian, one Iranian, two Iraqis, one Libyan, three Sudanese and one Vietnamese. All 12 were of male gender between the ages of 16 to 18 years. The average length of time missing was 1 day, however, one individual went missing for 95 days and two are still reported as missing. Out of ten UASC who were offered a return to home interview (to consider the reasons why they were missing and any support that could reduce the risks of future missing episodes), seven accepted.

Table 3



Between 01 April and 30 June 2021, there were 12 missing UASC episodes started which were made up by 7 individual UASC. Of these, one was Ethiopian, one Eritrean, one Sudanese, one Libyan, one Vietnamese and two mixed or Black African ethnicity. All 7 were of male gender between the ages of 16 and 18 years. One UASC is still reported as being missing and the six that returned were offered a home to return interview out of which five accepted. As at the end of June 2021 there were a total of 3 UASC who were long term missing and being reviewed as part of the 6 weekly strategy meetings with multi-agency partners.

3.8 Placements

3.9 Foster placements

At the 30 June 2021 there were currently 10 UASC placed in foster care in the following areas:

- Bexley
- Essex
- Greenwich
- Redbridge

3.10 Semi Independent Provision

At the 30 June 2021, There were currently 17 UASC placed in supported accommodation placed in the following areas:

- Essex
- Hackney

- Havering
- Havering
- Redbridge
- Thurrock

Costs of Supported Accommodation

Thurrock ('Higher Rate Threshold', HRT) is currently (0.07) and will receive grant funding per person per night of £143. The cost of supported accommodation placements for UASC ranges from approximately £800 per week to £1,000, which is dependent on the assessed support needs of a young person. The authority currently has 28 UASC who are Looked After and an additional 3 UASC who are missing.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 Members to note and comment on the work with UASC.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 N/A

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 None noted.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Michelle Hall**
Senior Management Accountant

In 2021/22 the Home Office advised that they will make payments for each eligible UASC at the rate set out in the table below. Those local authorities looking after volumes of UASC at or above the 0.07% threshold will be paid a higher rate. Those local authorities looking after UASC which amount to less than 0.07% threshold will be paid the lower rate.

| Category | £ per person per night |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Local authorities at or above 0.07% | 143 |
| Local authorities below 0.07% | 114 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Individual children transferred from local authorities above 0.07% to local authorities below 0.07% | 143 |
|---|-----|

Thurrock ('Higher Rate Threshold', HRT) is currently (0.07%) and if numbers are consistent the authority could receive grant funding per person per night of £143. At the end of period 4 there were 27 Looked After UASC and an additional 3 UASC who are missing and are not considered to be Looked After.

The cost of supported accommodation placements for UASC ranges from £800 per week to £1,000, which is dependent on, need and support.

| Position as of May 21 | £m |
|------------------------|---------|
| Number of UASC 27 | |
| Spend to date | 0.117 |
| Grant received to date | (0.147) |
| | |

The grant received is based on the number of UASC who were looked after at the time of the claim in period 1 and 2.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal (social care and education)

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children will almost always be 'children in need' and therefore entitled to be provided with various services by the local authority, usually including accommodation. These services will usually fall to be provided under Children Act 1989, s 20.

National Transfer Scheme (NTS)

The National Transfer Scheme Protocol for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children provides guidance on the operation of the NTS and the way in which local authorities can transfer unaccompanied children to another local authority in accordance with the Immigration Act 2016, s69. The changes announced on 10th June 2021 including the rota will come into effect as soon as possible and are as a result of a joint Home Office and DfE consultation with local authorities across the UK.

Independent Child Trafficking Guardians (ICTGs)

The Interim Guidance for Independent Child Trafficking Guardians provides interim guidance to the Additional Sites where ICTGs, both ICTG Direct Workers and ICTG Regional Practice Coordinators, were introduced in May

2021. This interim guidance will be in place prior to the commencement of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, s48 and before the provision of regulations supporting section 48. This interim guidance is published under the Modern Slavery Act 2015, s49.

This interim guidance describes specific legislative functions and duties and provides guidance in relation to children who have been trafficked. It is expected that public authorities give due regard to ICTG Direct Workers and ICTG Regional Practice Coordinators' functions, as would be required by regulations made under section 48 (6) (e) (i) and Section 48 (6) (e) (ii) of the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

Age Assessments

In order for an age assessment to be valid, it must comply with the findings of *R (B) v Merton LBC* [2003] 4 All ER 280 (or what is commonly referred to as the age assessment being "Merton Compliant"), where the Court provides guidance as to the conduct of an age assessment.

Currently, the Care of Unaccompanied Migrant Children and Child Victims of Modern Slavery – Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities provides that where the age of a person is uncertain and there are reasons to believe that they are a child, they are presumed to be a child in order to receive immediate access to assistance, support and protection in accordance with the Modern Slavery Act 2015, s51

The Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Act 2020 (the 2020 Act) included a statutory obligation to review legal routes to the UK from the European Union (EU) for protection claimants, including publicly consulting on the family reunion of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). The consultation has led to a proposed reform the system for carrying out age assessments for UASC's by enabling the use of currently prohibited "scientific methods", such as dental x-rays, to help determine age.

The new system of age assessment would be overseen by a National Age Assessment Board, which would set out the criteria to be followed, review local authority assessments and carry out age assessments itself when necessary.

National Referral Mechanism

The Statutory Guidance Modern Slavery: How to Identify and Support Victims, published under the Modern Slavery Act 2015, s49(1) is guidance for those who make decisions on whether or not an individual is a potential victim/victim of modern slavery for the purpose of the NRM.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Smith**

Strategic Lead for Community Development and Equalities

Childrens Social Care, along with partner agencies, are committed to child centred practice which takes account of the traumatic experiences for UASC. These children and young people are claiming asylum and in some cases this will be because they have experienced discrimination as a result of their gender, culture, religion and other characteristics which result in persecution in their country of origin. Social workers seek to provide a compassionate response enhancing the UASC's sense of security and creating safety for these young people.

- 7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, Health Inequalities, and Impact on Looked After Children

N/A

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- N/A

9. **Appendices to the report**

None

Report Author:

Luke Froment Service Manager Children Looked After and Aftercare
Naintara Khosla, Strategic Lead, Children Looked After, Aftercare
Childrens Social Care

Work Programme

Committee: Hidden and Extreme Harms Prevention Committee

Year: 2021/22

Dates of Meetings: 21 October 2021, 16 December 2021, 17 February 2022

| Topic | Lead Officer | Requested by Officer/Member |
|---|--|-----------------------------|
| 21 October 2021 | | |
| Thurrock Council's Response to Human Trafficking and Modern Day Slavery | Fran Leddra | Member |
| Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers: Introductory Report | Janet Simon | Member |
| Thurrock Council's Response to Criminal Gang Activity | Jason Read/ Michelle Cunningham | Member |
| Thurrock Council's Response to Prevent Duty 2015 | Cheryl Wells/ Michelle Cunningham/ Les Billingham | Member |
| Essex Police: Verbal Update | Chief Super Intendent Stuart Hooper/ Cheryl Wells | Member |
| Work Programme | Democratic Services Officer | Standard Item |
| 16 December 2021 | | |
| Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers: Introductory Report <i>(continued from previous meeting)</i> | Janet Simon | Member |
| Essex Police: Verbal Update | Chief Super Intendent Stuart Hooper/ Cheryl Wells | Member |

Work Programme

| Topic | Lead Officer | Requested by Officer/Member |
|---|--|-----------------------------|
| Violence Against Women and Girls/Men and Boys Verbal Discussion with SERICC | Michelle Cunningham | Members |
| Work Programme | Democratic Services Officer | Standard Item |
| 17 February 2022 | | |
| Modern Day Slavery and Human Trafficking: Update Report | Fran Leddra | Member |
| Unaccompanied Child Asylum Seekers | Naintara Khosla/Luke Froment/Janet Simon | Member |
| Violence Against Men and Boys | Fran Leddra/Michelle Cunningham | Member |
| Hate Crime and Social Media | Michelle Cunningham | Member |
| Work Programme | Democratic Services Officer | Standard Item |

Clerk: Democratic Services

Updated: 8 December 2021