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Email: Tony.Newman@croydon.gov.uk
Date: 19 July 2018

Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP
Home Secretary
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Sajid

I am writing to you because of the very serious issues arising from our role as the gateway borough for unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) and the actions of the Home Office. In the case we are making for Croydon in this letter, it was put to our members at our July 18 Council meeting and a motion was passed receiving cross party support.

We have been seeking a way forward with various ministers and senior civil servants. To be frank, we have been unable to make progress. We last had a meeting with the then Immigration Minister on 16 November 2017.

At that meeting, the crucial role Croydon plays in the national system for UASC was recognised. We followed up this meeting with some specific asks and some detailed notes. However, there has been no progress since then. We remain absolutely committed to delivering for those involved.

There are four key areas, which we wish to highlight:

- The failure of the Transfer Scheme to bring our UASC numbers down towards the level of 0.07%
- The inadequacy of the daily rates we receive for accommodating UASC, especially when taking into account the knock-on impact on the costs for our local Looked After Children and other costs such as drain on the High Needs block of our Education funding
- The failure to fund the infrastructure costs of being a gateway borough
- The failure to deal with individuals who have turned 18 for leave to remain applications and those who are all rights exhausted (ARE)

The combination of these factors is that there is a burden for the Croydon Council tax payer in terms of clear related costs of some £7m per annum.

Transfer Scheme

As I'm sure you are aware, the National Transfer Scheme is not working effectively at the moment. Its voluntary status means that Croydon is still having to take a significant number

of new UASCs. In addition, for 16/17 year old applicants, the London agreement is starting to show signs of not coping, as over half the London boroughs are now at their maximum level. Croydon is currently taking considerable numbers of UASC even though we are at over five times what the maximum any borough is meant to have.

Daily rates

These have not been revisited properly in a number of years. The reality is that they barely cover the direct costs of accommodating our UASC, costs of foster care, allocated social worker teams, management costs and associated services.

We recognise that our rates are more than those offered under the National Transfer Scheme. Clearly, the costs for a small number are less, as you do not have the management and other related costs. We are aware that many authorities are saying that they do not wish to take any UASC because of insufficient funding. We believe that Kent may receive a substantially higher level than we do.

We have many other additional costs, which are not covered by the current daily rate, such as additional education costs which are an estimated £900,000 per annum drain on. In addition, we would point out that as we seek to accommodate our UASC in foster care wherever possible, this means that our local looked after children are less likely to be with in-house carers and are more likely to be accommodated outside Croydon in commissioned placements, all of which has financial implications.

Infrastructure Costs

As mentioned in past meetings and correspondence, our role as a gateway authority means we have substantial additional costs, such as senior management posts, special needs posts, staff imbedded in the Home Office, upfront costs of placements and assessments and legal costs. We also maintain a daily duty service at Lunar House which is of substantial benefit to the Home Office but for which we receive no funding. Previously we received a specific grant for this, in addition to a daily rate, but this stopped a number of years ago.

UASCs post 18

We are seeing substantial delays in determinations on leave to remain applications post eighteen, unresolved appeals for families with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) and a lack of co-ordinated enforcement action with individuals who are all rights exhausted (ARE). In particular given the change in legislation regarding care leavers having the right to be supported until 25, this is putting a huge burden on the Council. And, in the case of NRPF and ARE, we do not even get a contribution to the costs of supporting them.

Clearly, these delays are damaging to the individuals concerned, as they do not know what is happening to them and cannot get on with their lives.

Our position and ask

As we reiterated at our meeting we take our role as a gateway borough very seriously and ensure that the right level of infrastructure is in place to respond to the range of issues that can result from this. However we do not believe this should place a substantial burden on the taxpayer of Croydon, as is the case currently.

Therefore the key issue for us is ensuring there is a fair funding package and our preferred route for achieving this is that we return to the previous system where our funding was based on a core fixed amount, alongside enhanced daily rates both for UASC and the over 18s we are supporting. These amounts should recognise the direct and indirect costs.

We would ask for urgent action on improving the National Transfer Scheme and looking again at the regional scheme to ensure that we do not have to take on new UASC other than in special circumstances.

We would ask that our cases are prioritised in terms of determinations, appeals and enforcement action.

I would request an urgent meeting with you personally, together with relevant colleagues and officers on both sides, to take this forward.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Tony Newman

Leader of the Council

London Borough of Croydon

CC:

Sarah Jones MP for Croydon Central

Steve Reed MP for Croydon North

Chris Philp MP for Croydon South

Cllr Simon Hall – Cabinet Member for Finance & Treasury

Cllr Tim Pollard – Leader of the Opposition

