



For the Citizens'
Rights Agreements

Assurance Review (Looked After Children and Care Leavers) Annex 1a: North East Final regional report July 2024

**Local authority responses on support for Looked after Children
and Care Leavers in making applications to the EU Settlement
Scheme**

Introduction

The Independent Monitoring Authority for the Citizens' Rights Agreements (IMA) has completed individual assurance reviews with 12 local authorities in the North East of England. Individual assurance reviews were conducted with local authorities who had not, during a previous information gathering exercise conducted in October 2022, provided sufficient information to demonstrate that they were discharging their responsibility to support eligible looked after children and care leavers, who were eligible to make an application to the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS). The methodology and rationale for this work has been outlined in our main report.

To deliver these reviews, the IMA sought assurance in the following three areas:

1. robustness of the identification processes;
2. accurate record keeping; and
3. completion of retrospective checks

This updated regional report will reflect the findings of these reviews.

Assurance Review findings

1. The IMA is assured that all local authorities in the North East of England had (or have now implemented) robust processes in place to identify eligible looked after children, care leavers and their family members. Local authorities demonstrated they were recording the nationalities and place of birth of children and young people who entered their care, assisting with the identification of potentially eligible applicants to the EUSS including strategies for the identification and support of non-EU/EEA EFTA family members.

2. The IMA is assured that appropriate record keeping procedures are in place, as set out in the [guidance](#) issued by the Home Office, along with confirmation that retrospective checks of all children and care leavers in their remit have been completed and remain ongoing.

3. Following individual assurance reviews, the IMA identified the majority of local authorities had clear processes in place to identify and support eligible children to make applications to the EUSS. Many took proactive steps to review their current practice for effective identification and implemented changes as a result of this review which were shared with us. These are further outlined on page 4.

4. Where required, the IMA shared Best Practice Principles and further guidance with local authorities in advance of the individual assurance review, assisting local authorities to undertake proactive reviews of their processes with some being able to identify and implement improvements before meeting with the IMA.

5. Several local authorities said they had consulted an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) to review potential eligibility of children in their care. This provided an additional level of assurance to the IMA.

6. Many local authorities reported that staff had attended EUSS awareness sessions with the Department for Education and with the Home Office along with knowledge sharing sessions with other local authorities. This created a greater awareness of the EUSS amongst Social Workers, support staff and Senior Management teams.

7. Three local authorities reported that they had undertaken extensive manual checks of all their records to assist with the identification of eligible cohorts and dedicated resources to complete this work.

8. One local authority told us that while they had clear processes and procedures in place in respect of identification and data recording, they reported experiencing issues with the proper identification of eligible non-EU and EEA EFTA family members, noting that while nationality is recorded for the child or young person, it is not routinely captured for parents and relatives as this is often not pertinent to the social care interventions of the child.

9. As a result of our initial regional report being published and in advance of the assurance review, one local authority told us they took proactive steps to manually check records and issued additional communications to Social Workers about the EUSS. Consequently, two further eligible children were identified and supported to submit applications to the EUSS and secure status.

10. One local authority submitted their original response after the initial deadline, meaning they were graded as red in the report. However, in readiness for the individual assurance review, they completed a full audit of their records and shared relevant training material with the IMA to provide assurance. This led to a revised grading of green in the report and no further improvements were identified as necessary by the IMA.

11. Two local authorities reported low volumes of eligible cohorts in their care, however, were able to assure the IMA that the appropriate processes were in place by proactively sharing documentation and policies created during individual assurance reviews.

12. One local authority reported a reduction in the number of children identified as eligible, explaining that this is because some children are no longer being cared for or the child's status may have changed as some may have changed status. For example, the child may not be classed as a care leaver.

13. As a result of IMA engagement, a further two local authorities completed further checks of their records, despite clear processes in place, the additional checks identified one additional child who was supported in making an application to EUSS.

Improvements by local authorities

The following improvements were noted as a result of these reviews:

System Improvements

14. As a result of these reviews, four local authorities reported that they had made improvements to their Case Management Systems using the best practice guidance that was shared by the IMA. Improvements included the requirement to record the young person's nationality to assist with the proper identification of eligible children and young people.

15. Several local authorities reported that they had made further improvements to their record keeping processes, including the introduction of an 'alert function' to notify relevant Service Managers of any key dates or required action in relation to a young person's EUSS status.

16. We noted further system improvements, including the automatic identification of eligible children to ensure they are never missed.

Policy Improvements

17. One local authority reported that although they did not identify any children or young people currently in their care, as a result of IMA engagement, a robust policy was implemented along with new record and reporting mechanisms to promote awareness of EUSS and ensure no child is missed both now and in the future, should any eligible child be referred to its services.

Process Improvements

18. One local authority reported that while they had a clear process in place, as a result of IMA engagement, they proactively created a new EUSS Settlement Status Practice Guidance document and conducted further training to service teams. As a result, three additional children in care were identified and supported to make applications to the EUSS.

19. One local authority reported that it had reviewed its communication, creating seven-minute guides and publishing its policies internally to further assist staff, and undertaking further auditing of records.

20. One local authority had several meetings with the IMA. They introduced new training and improvements to their process for record keeping and retrospective checks with IMA support to achieve assurance.

21. The IMA has welcomed the positive engagement with each local authority in the North East region, noting the collaboration with the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and their Regional Leads for encouraging local authority engagement with this work. The IMA are aware of the operational pressure local authorities are under and are thankful for their assistance with this assurance review.

RAG Grading: local authority previous and revised gradings

Initial Local Authority Response (2022)

Local Authority	Identification	Record keeping	Retrospective checks
Durham	Orange	Green	Orange
Darlington	Red	Red	Red
Gateshead	Red	Red	Red
Hartlepool	Orange	Orange	Orange
Middlesbrough	Red	Red	Red
Newcastle	Orange	Orange	Orange
North Tyneside	Red	Orange	Red
Northumberland	Red	Red	Red
Redcar and Cleveland	Orange	Orange	Orange
South Tyneside	Red	Red	Red
Stockton-on-Tees	Orange	Green	Orange
Sunderland	Orange	Green	Orange

RAG Grading: local authority previous and revised gradings

Individual Assurance Review Outcome (2024)

Local Authority	Identification	Record keeping	Retrospective checks
Durham			
Darlington			
Gateshead			
Hartlepool			
Middlesbrough			
Newcastle			
North Tyneside			
Northumberland			
Redcar and Cleveland			
South Tyneside			
Stockton-on-Tees			
Sunderland			

Next Steps

22. Each local authority in the North East region has been notified of their re-grading following the conclusion of all individual assurance reviews, along with a copy of their revised assessment.

23. Based on the information provided, the IMA does not at this stage consider that further compliance action is required by any local authority in the North East in relation to this assurance review. The IMA will share our findings with key stakeholders for the purpose of knowledge sharing.

24. The IMA may contact any local authority in the future should we require further information or if any subsequent issues arise regarding this review.