
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

18 February 2020

Cabinet

Title: New UK Resettlement Scheme

Purpose: To provide Cabinet with an update on the Council's participation in the Syrian Resettlement Programme, which is due to end in March 2020, and to seek approval to participate in the new UK Resettlement Scheme for 2020/21.

Recommendation: (a) Note the progress made on Syrian Resettlement Programme, which is due to end in March 2020.
(b) Approve the Council's participation in the UK Resettlement Scheme, including a commitment to provide a safe haven for a further 30 refugees (6 families) by March 2021.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 In September 2015 the Council responded to an urgent request from the UK Government and COSLA's Strategic Migration Partnership to assist those refugees displaced from Syria. As a result, the Council made a humanitarian commitment to resettle 100 refugees by March 2020, in line with the UK Government's targeted timescales.
- 1.2 North Ayrshire Council has fully participated in the Syrian Resettlement Programme and, due to meeting its initial target numbers earlier than expected, increased its pledge on two further occasions, taking the overall total to 201 refugees (41 families).
- 1.3 The Council is again well advanced in meeting this target and will complete the resettlement of 201 refugees by the end of February 2020.
- 1.4 On 17 June 2019, the UK Government confirmed its ongoing commitment to resettlement post 2020, announcing plans for a new UK Resettlement Scheme which will see thousands more refugees provided with a route to protection. The UK Resettlement Scheme will consolidate the existing Syrian Resettlement Programme (SRP), Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) and Gateway Protection Programme, which will all come to a natural end in 2020. The new scheme will be open to refugees identified by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to be in need of resettlement to the UK because of their vulnerability; the scheme does not have a specific geographical focus.

Local authority participation in the new scheme will continue to be voluntary, with refugees allocated in the same way as currently under SRP and VCRS.

- 1.5 It is proposed that the Council participates in the new UK Resettlement Scheme and agrees a commitment to provide a safe haven for a further 30 refugees (6 families) by March 2021.

2. Background

- 2.1 In September 2015 the Council responded to an urgent request from the UK Government and COSLA's Strategic Migration Partnership to assist those refugees displaced from Syria. As a result, the Council made a humanitarian commitment and will have successfully resettled 201 refugees over the 4 years of the programme.
- 2.2 The Council has an established Syrian Refugee Task Force, chaired by the Head of Physical Environment. The Task Force provides strategic direction and ensures delivery of operational support across all services that are engaging with and supporting Syrian families.
- 2.3 The Task Force meets on a regular basis and includes representatives from across the Community Planning Partnership. Housing Services takes the lead role in the coordination of services to refugees and other members of the Task Force include Education & Youth Employment, Health and Social Care Partnership, Community Development, Employment & Skills, NHS, Police Scotland, Scottish Fire & Rescue, DWP, Ayrshire College and the third sector. This approach and support has been crucial in building capacity within each service. It ensures that communication is consistent, resources are targeted and learning is shared to enhance the quality of service delivery.
- 2.4 Our Refugee Support Team continues to manage the service provided to refugees. The team delivers support services, manages the resettlement and integration process and problem solves as required. We also employ a coordinator, bi-lingual liaison officer, teachers and classroom assistants to assist refugee children at school. The Health & Social Care Partnership have a Syrian Refugee Coordinator who co-ordinates all health services delivered by the partnership to refugee families.
- 2.5 By the end of February 2020 we will have accommodated 201 refugees comprising of 41 Syrian families - 74 parents and 127 children. Families have settled well across seven towns and have been warmly welcomed into North Ayrshire's communities.
- 2.6 All children of school age are engaged in education, while adults receive language tuition through the English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) service provided by the Council. The Council works in partnership with Ayrshire College. A pan-Ayrshire approach to ESOL provision has been introduced to support a consistent approach to service delivery across Ayrshire.
- 2.7 The Council's Employability Service continues to arrange volunteering, work experience and placements with local companies, matched to the skills and competencies of each adult.
- 2.8 The ongoing focus is to improve language skills to enhance personal social development, aid refugee integration and improve employment prospects of those of working age. Our aims also align with the vision of the national 'New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy' which strives for a welcoming Scotland where refugees are able to rebuild their lives from the day they arrive. The Council has carefully and successfully

managed the expectations and needs of local communities alongside the needs of the vulnerable families resettled.

3. Proposals

- 3.1 The Home Office is seeking the support and participation of UK local authorities in relation to the new Resettlement Scheme.
- 3.2 In Scotland, local authorities will continue to be supported by COSLA's Strategic Migration Partnership at both a strategic and operational level to deliver on the commitments made. The Scottish Government supports the efforts made by local authorities and COSLA to offer a place of safety to those fleeing war and persecution.
- 3.3 The requirements of the new UK Resettlement Scheme mirror the current programme and will continue to be fully funded by Home Office grants, minimising the potential for any additional financial burden on the Council at a time of financial austerity.
- 3.4 The successful approach to integration adopted by the Council over the last four years has been recognised nationally by both COSLA and the Home Office. It is proposed that we continue to build on this approach and extend our humanitarian commitment to providing a safe haven for vulnerable refugees, many of whom have experienced significant trauma.
- 3.5 Our staff have developed the capacity and skills necessary to continue to support refugee families and deliver the Council's commitment.
- 3.6 It is proposed that the Council builds on this success and commits to welcoming a further 30 refugees (approximately 6 families) by the March 2021 deadline.
- 3.7 This increased commitment will be funded entirely by Home Office grant and will be managed in a way that continues to carefully balance the needs of local communities with those of the vulnerable refugees.

4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

Financial

- 4.1 There are no additional financial implications arising from this report as all costs are met through Home Office grant funding.

Human Resources

- 4.2 The continuation of the Council's humanitarian commitment will require the extension of temporary contracts for those staff involved specifically to work with refugees.

Legal

- 4.3 None.

Equality/Socio-economic

- 4.4 The further extension of our resettlement programme will have a positive impact on the refugees given a safe haven in North Ayrshire and on the ethnic minority group of refugees already resettled.

Environmental and Sustainability

- 4.5 None.

Key Priorities

- 4.6 Resettling refugees will contribute to achieving the Council Plan priorities of 'Active and strong communities' and 'People and communities are safe'.

Community Wealth Building

- 4.7 None.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 All members of the Syrian Refugee Task Force have been consulted regarding the contents of this report. Members represent a wide number of internal and external services including Physical Environment, Finance and Corporate Support, Education, Health & Social Care Partnership, Connected Communities, Economic Development & Regeneration, Police Scotland, Department for Work & Pensions, Primary Care NHS Ayrshire & Arran, The Ayrshire Community Trust, and Ayrshire College.

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Background Papers

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