
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

27 August 2019

Cabinet

Title: Syrian Resettlement Programme

Purpose: To advise the Cabinet of progress made since the Council's humanitarian commitment to participate in the Syrian Resettlement Programme in 2015 and to seek approval to further extend this commitment.

Recommendation: Cabinet is asked to:

- (i) Note the progress made on the Syrian Resettlement Programme to date;
- (ii) Agree to further extend the Council's initial commitment and provide safe haven to a further 40 refugees with a deadline of March 2020. This will increase our overall commitment to a final total of 200 refugees.

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 initially resettle 100 refugees in line with the UK Government target timescales of March 2020.
- 1.2 North Ayrshire Council fully participated in the Syrian Resettlement Programme and in February 2018, due to meeting its initial target numbers earlier than expected, increased its pledge by a further 60 refugees, increasing the overall total to 160 refugees.
- 1.3 The Council is again well in advance of meeting this revised target and will complete the resettlement of 160 refugees by September 2019.
- 1.4 The humanitarian crisis continues in Syria with millions of people displaced as a result. Cabinet approval is sought for the Council to continue the humanitarian commitment already made and provide a safe haven to a further 40 refugees leading up to the conclusion of the current programme in March 2020. This will increase our overall commitment to a final total of 200 refugees resettled within North Ayrshire.

- 1.5 This commitment should build on the successful approach adopted by all partner agencies involved and the Council should continue to carefully manage the process to balance the needs of local communities with that of vulnerable refugees.

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 to resettle up to 100 refugees over the next four years.
- 2.2 The Council has an established Syrian Refugee Task Force, which is chaired by the Head of Physical Environment. This provides strategic direction and ensures delivery of operational support across all services that are engaging with and supporting Syrian families.
- 2.3 This group continues to meet on a regular basis and includes representatives from across the Community Planning Partnership. Housing 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 from services has been crucial in building capacity within each service. It ensures that communication is consistent, resources are targeted, and learning is shared to enhance front line service delivery.
- 2.4 The refugee support team within Housing continues to manage the service provided to refugees. The team delivers support services, manages the resettlement and integration process and resolves any issues as they arise. A bi-lingual liaison officer, teachers, class room assistants and coordinator within Education assist refugee children at school. The Health & Social Care Partnership have a Syrian Refugee Coordinator to co-ordinate services delivered by the partnership to refugee families.
- 2.5 Our first families arrived on 17 November 2015 and others have continued to arrive on a regular basis since that time. To assist resettlement our approach has been to welcome two families at a time and where possible to resettle linked families. We have also prioritised the accommodation of families who already have relatives in North Ayrshire or the surrounding areas.
- 2.6 To date we have accommodated 31 Syrian families, a total of 150 refugees - 56 Adults and 94 children. Families have settled well and have been warmly welcomed into North Ayrshire's communities.
- 2.7 All children of school age are engaged in education and adults receive language tuition; English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) is provided by the Council. The Council works in partnership with Ayrshire College and has introduced a pan-Ayrshire approach to ESOL provision, with a consistent approach to service delivery across Ayrshire.
- 2.8 The Council's Employability and Skills service will continue to support the Syrian 'new Scots' develop their language and vocational skills to support them to move into further education, training and or employment. The focus since the resettlement programme began has been on improving their language skills, identifying suitable work experience

placements, introducing them to local employers and working with Ayrshire College and other training providers to help them achieve vocational qualifications. Although this is a long term process there have been some individual successes and to date we have 19 positive outcomes, including: 7 moving into employment, including a Modern Apprentice within North Ayrshire Council, 14 have progressed to college and are completing various qualifications ranging from motor vehicle mechanics, computing, joinery, hospitality and care. In addition to this work experience opportunities have been created with North Ayrshire Council, the private and voluntary sectors; a number have passed their driving licences including HGV license, and; others are volunteering with various organisations across North Ayrshire.

- 2.9 The ongoing focus is to improve language skills to enhance personal and social development, aid 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' of a welcoming Scotland where refugees are able to rebuild their lives from the day they arrive.
- 2.10 The project continues to be funded entirely from Home Office grant funding to minimise the potential for any additional financial burden on the Council at a time of financial austerity. We have successfully and carefully managed the expectations and needs of the local communities with that of the needs of the vulnerable families resettled.

3. Proposals

- 3.1 Due to the duration and scale of the crisis in Syria the Home Office continues to seek the support of local authorities in the UK. In Scotland, local authorities are 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.
- 3.2 The successful approach adopted by the Council to integration has been recognised nationally by both COSLA and the Home Office. We should continue to build on this approach and extend our humanitarian commitment to provide a safe haven for vulnerable refugees, many who have experienced significant trauma.
- 3.3 The Council's current commitment to resettle up to 160 refugees in the period up to 2020 will be achieved 6 months earlier than anticipated. Our staff working with refugees have built capacity and skills to continue to support refugee families and to deliver the Council's commitment. It is proposed that we build on this success and continue to support the humanitarian effort within the time frame already agreed and welcome a further 40 refugees (approx. 8 families) leading up to the March 2020 deadline.
- 3.4 This will continue to 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 that of the needs of vulnerable refugees.

4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

Financial

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

Human Resources

- 4.2 If approved, this extension of the Council's humanitarian commitment will extend temporary contracts of those staff involved specifically to work with refugees.

Legal

- 4.3 None

Equality/Socio-economic

- 4.4 If approved this report 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's Aspiring Communities priority to achieve active and strong communities and that children and young people experience the best start in life.

Community Wealth Building

- 4.7 None

5. Consultation

- 5.1 Consultation has taken place with Syrian Refugee Task Force member representatives who have confirmed their support for the proposal.

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For further information please contact Robert McGilvery, Senior Manager - Housing Operations (Temporary) on 01294 310175

Background Papers

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