
SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS – A SCHEME FOR THE RESETTLEMENT OF SYRIAN REFUGESSES IN THE SCOTTISH BORDERS

Report by the Chief Executive

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

12 November 2015

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 **This report outlines the work that has been undertaken to develop a scheme for the resettlement of Syrian Refugee households into the Scottish Borders, and seeks approval to start a negotiation process with the Home Office to resettle Syrian refugee families.**
- 1.2 The report highlights the position of UK and Scottish Governments on the resettlement of Syrian refugees into the UK and Scotland. The UK Government's Scheme aims to resettle 20,000 refugees over the next four years and the Scottish Government has indicated that 2,000 refugees could be resettled in Scotland. The Scheme prioritises those refugees who cannot be supported effectively in their region of origin: women and children at risk, people in severe need of medical care, and survivors of torture and violence. Local authorities are recognised as the lead body in this resettlement process. Funding is provided by the Home Office to support local authorities taking part in the Scheme.
- 1.3 The proposed Scottish Borders refugee resettlement scheme would aim to resettle up to 10 refugee families in the next four years. This would be in line with the Scottish Borders share of the 2,000 refugees coming to Scotland based on the area's proportion of the Scottish population.
- 1.4 It is proposed that the local scheme begins with two families, and then gradually increase this number by building on the learning process from resettling the refugees. This conforms to the approach taken by other local authorities. The initial location for resettling the refugee families would be Galashiels because of its good transport connections, public and private services and support structures. It is intended that other locations would be considered as part of the 'roll-out' of the scheme.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **I recommend that the Council agree that officers progress the work to resettle refugee families into the Scottish Borders.**

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In response to the unfolding Syrian refugee crisis the Prime Minister of the UK Government announced on 7 September 2015 that the UK would take an additional 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020. Following this announcement, Mr Humza Yousaf, the Scottish Government Minister for Europe & International Development, said: "*As made clear by the First Minister at last week's emergency humanitarian summit, Scotland is willing to take our fair share of refugees to help some of the most vulnerable people in need*". This 'fair share' equates to 2,000 refugees over the next 4-5 years. Local authorities are recognised by both the UK and Scottish Governments as taking the lead in the resettlement of refugees.
- 3.2 As a result of these announcements, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), on behalf of its members has been working with both Scottish and UK Governments to agree the processes that will see refugees resettled and integrated into Scotland. The aim is to support a common approach that builds on current practice and enables the refugees to have the best chance of integrating successfully into Scottish society.
- 3.3 A national Taskforce at the Scottish Government level has been established which is chaired by Mr Yousaf, with Housing and Integration Sub-Groups. COSLA is represented on both groups. In addition there have been regular Tri-partite discussions involving COSLA, UK, and Scottish Governments. COSLA has also organized a series of information sessions where information and guidance has been imparted to local authorities. Officers from Scottish Borders Council have attended these meetings.
- 3.4 There has been an existing Syrian Refugee Scheme operated by the UK Government's Home Office. This was established in February 2014. Five Scottish local authorities were involved in this initial scheme. These were Glasgow City Council, Edinburgh City Council, Renfrewshire Council, Perth and Kinross Council and East Dunbartonshire Council. The new UK Syrian Refugee programme (see Appendix 1) known as the Syrian Vulnerable Person Scheme is based on the existing scheme. The Scheme prioritises those refugees who cannot be supported effectively in their region of origin: women and children at risk, people in severe need of medical care and survivors of torture and violence.
- 3.5 The UK Government sets the criteria and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) identifies and submits potential cases for Home Office (HO) consideration. Cases are screened and considered and the HO retains the right to reject on security, war crimes or other grounds. Once the screening process has been completed a full medical assessment is conducted by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in the host country. Full details of the case and medical history are sent to the local authority and partners for assessment of need, including whether suitable accommodation and care are available locally. Local authorities are asked to accept or reject cases.
- 3.6 Eligibility is then confirmed and IOM start the visa application process. UK Visas and Immigration International issue UK visas (3 months Leave

Outside of the Rules) and on arrival, arrangements are made for Biometric Residence Permits to be issued with 5 years' humanitarian protection.

- 3.7 A financial package has been put together for local authorities and Health services taking refugees. (See Appendix 2). Further additions to this assistance are under discussion including multi-year funding. Also, the Home Office has acknowledged that given the specific requirements of this refugee group, the types of services required are not definitive. It is open to negotiation if local authorities consider there are other elements not covered that would require funding. The Scottish Government has also allocated £1 million for this financial year to support local refugee resettlement programmes and it will probably focus this assistance on high cost cases based on need.
- 3.8 Local authorities in Scotland are in different positions with respect to resettling Syrian refugees depending on their past experience in such matters. It is understood that up to 18 local authorities may take refugees before Christmas 2015. Scottish Borders Council has had no past experience in taking refugees or asylum seekers and would be one of the later authorities to take part in resettlement schemes.

4 RESPONSE BY SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL AND ITS PARTNERS

- 4.1 In considering how the Scottish Borders can respond and play its part in the overall effort, a number of immediate issues have been raised that would need to be considered before we could formally begin accepting refugees. These are identified below:
- Is there housing available locally and where should refugees be located initially?
 - What range of support services do we need to put in place to assist the refugees establish themselves both immediately and over the longer term in the Scottish Borders?
 - What local support networks might there be for refugees?
 - How do we harness and coordinate the community in supporting the refugees to successfully resettle and integrate into the local community?
 - How to engage with the national programme of resettlement and to access the funding support available from this programme?
 - What lessons can be learned from resettlement schemes in other areas?
- 4.2 Whilst there is an understandable desire to be responding immediately to the crisis, the resettlement of refugees needs to be done in a coordinated and resourced manner that enables vulnerable people who have already experienced significant trauma to be properly settled and supported. For this reason it is considered that a local programme should take a gradual approach and build on the lessons learned from resettling refugees. The aim is to take two families initially and increase this to 10 over a four year period.

5 KEY SERVICE REQUIREMENTS

Housing

- 5.1 There have been a significant number of offers from people and groups in communities to provide accommodation and other support for refugees. Discussions have taken place between the Council's Housing service and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). These have stressed the importance of ensuring refugees are not placed in isolated communities but in settlements large enough to support a number of refugee households. It is considered that refugee families need to be settled in an area where there are good transport connections, effective access to local services and support networks, and in safe places. Taking account of these factors it is considered that the most appropriate location for the initial resettlement of refugees is in the Galashiels area.

Provision of Support Services

- 5.2 Bringing a refugee and their household into the UK is complicated and requires a significant degree of co-ordination between the Home Office and the receiving authority. There will be a range of immediate support services that will be required by refugee families resettled into the Borders. These are identified and discussed in the following paragraphs.

Welfare Benefits Assistance

- 5.3 Within the first 48 hours of entering the UK refugees will be required to obtain a Biometric Residence Permit (BRP). These are managed by the Post Office and it is our understanding there are currently only eight places in Scotland where these can be obtained, two in Edinburgh. Once the BRP has been obtained then the refugee will need to get a National Insurance number. This will enable them to access to the full range of benefits from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) that a UK resident would normally have. Work is going on nationally to streamline this process. Experience from other areas suggests there have been problems in refugees opening bank accounts together with delays in putting benefits in place. This means that it is likely that there will be a need to give some initial financial support for refugee families to provide time to deal with these problems. There will also be an ongoing requirement to work with the Job Centres to ensure adult refugees are helped to meet the employment tests that are important for accessing benefits on an ongoing basis.

Social Care

- 5.4 Each refugee family resettled to the Scottish Borders will have unique support needs. This necessitates an early assessment and provision of services to meet the immediate Social Care needs. Evidence from other refugee resettlement schemes indicates that it is likely that once the family

have settled and their basic needs met then the psychological process of dealing with trauma and resettling to a foreign country will begin to emerge and require support through the provision of psychological services. There will be a requirement to support care arrangements that deal exclusively with resettled families. This has been the experience elsewhere and there will be a need to provide a single point of contact for the refugee family for support and signposting as well as a focal point for engagement by the Council.

Health

- 5.5 As refugee families are resettled to the Scottish Borders they will be entitled to the full range of health service provision as any ordinarily resident UK citizen. There is also likely to be specific support required such as primary care including health checks and immunisations and secondary care in terms of surgical operations etc. Assistance will also be needed to support the resettled family in registering for the full range of NHS services available. NHS Borders has indicated it will support the local resettlement programme for refugees.

Education

- 5.6 Any child being resettled into the Scottish Borders will be expected to be enrolled into a local primary or secondary school. For children of pre-school age early years' education would need to be provided. Refugee children will come with a range of educational/social challenges not counting the issues that come from speaking a different language and having to adapt to a different culture.

Language Interpretation and Learning to Speak English

- 5.7 Refugee families will need access to professional interpretation services. Contact has been made with possible providers and a contract will be required with an interpretation service as part of the resettlement programme. Such services are expensive and it is hoped language support can be supplemented with other local provision. There will also be a need for English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) learning for refugees and Borders College are working up proposals to include them in the provision of classes.

Community Safety

- 5.8 It is important that wherever refugees are located that they are in a safe environment. Also refugees need to be aware of the role of the police and requirements in terms of law and order. A great deal of work is being undertaken by Police Scotland to ensure that an effective approach is taken to these matters within a local resettlement programme.

Employment/Training

- 5.9 To ensure the effective integration of refugees and a flow of household

income there will be a need to provide vocational educational opportunities, employability skills and training for young people who may not fit easily into the school system although technically they may be of school age. The same will apply to adults who require retraining, confidence building and employability skills. Borders College has indicated it would be able to design targeted bespoke programmes for either group based on an assessment of need. There will also be need to assist refugees in identifying job opportunities.

Community Support

5.10 There has been a significant amount of correspondence received by the Council from individuals and organisations across the Scottish Borders who want to assist in any resettlement programme. This support has been acknowledged and information is being logged. It is planned that the voluntary sector is approached to establish a Syrian Refugee Group that might look at providing additional support for refugees. Work is planned to engage with local communities to assist in the integration process of refugees. There will also be a need to provide refugees with some cultural integration induction opportunities.

6 A SCOTTISH BORDERS' SYRIAN REFUGEES PROGRAMME

- 6.1 An officer group involving the Council services with input from other organisations such as NHS Borders, Police Scotland, Borders College, and Registered Social Landlords has been established. This has been meeting on a weekly basis to scope out a resettlement scheme for the Scottish Borders. This group is also liaising with the voluntary sector and other partners.
- 6.2 The Group has been working through the service implications of receiving refugees (as set out in Section 5 above) and is developing a plan for the resettlement of up to 10 refugee families in the Scottish Borders over the next four years in line with the timescale of the UK Government's programme. It is proposed to begin with two families and then gradually increase this number by building on the learning process from resettling the Syrian refugees. This is in line with the approach taken by other local authorities. The initial location for resettling the refugee families would be Galashiels because of its good transport connections, services and support structures. It is intended that other locations would be considered as part of the 'roll-out' of the scheme.

7 IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Financial

- (a) It is anticipated that the costs of the proposed resettlement programme would be met from financial assistance provided by the UK Government's Home Office (see Appendix 2). These costs would be measured as part of the initial resettlement of two refugees

families.

7.2 Risk and Mitigations

- (a) The key risks are likely to be in the area of service delivery and the provision of adequate funding to deliver any programme of resettlement into the Scottish Borders. Officers are currently working up a programme to deliver the necessary support and COSLA, on behalf of all Scottish local authorities are negotiating with the Home Office to ensure full cost recovery.
- (b) It is important to ensure that the local resettlement scheme is well planned as there are reputational risks to the Council and its partners if issues are not properly anticipated.

7.3 Equalities

An equality impact assessment will form part of the planned local resettlement programme.

7.4 Acting Sustainably

There are no significant impacts on the economy, community or environment arising from the proposals contained in this report.

7.5 Carbon Management

There are no significant effects on carbon emissions arising from the proposals contained in this report.

7.6 Rural Proofing

This report does not relate to new or amended policy or strategy and as a result rural proofing is not an applicable consideration.

7.7 Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation

There are no changes to be made to either the Scheme of Administration or the Scheme of Delegation as a result of the proposals contained in this report.

8 CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Chief Financial Officer, the Monitoring Officer, the Chief Legal Officer, the Service Director Strategy and Policy, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Chief Officer HR, and the Clerk to the Council have been consulted and any comments will be tabled at the meeting.
- 8.2 The Council's Corporate Management Team has been consulted on the report.

Approved by

Chief Executive

Signature

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