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## **UNITED KINGDOM (SYRIAN) VULNERABLE PERSONS RESETTLEMENT SCHEME**

**Report by Chief Social Work and Public Protection Officer**

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### **SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL**

**27 August 2020**

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#### **1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report provides an update to Scottish Borders Council on the Council's participation in the United Kingdom (Syrian) Resettlement Scheme, and Home Office proposals to continue accepting refugees under a new Resettlement Scheme commencing in 2020/21.**
- 1.2 Up to February 2020 the Scottish Borders received 9 Syrian families. It should be noted that this is a long term (60 month) commitment from the date of arrival. After 60 months an application is made for settled status.
- 1.3 The agreed pro rata distribution of Syrian refugees (New Scots) arriving under this scheme has meant that Scottish Borders Council made an original commitment to receive 10 families. It is anticipated that this number will be reached during 2020/21. The availability of suitable housing to match families into is the main challenge and regulates arrivals. Registered Social Landlords have been supportive throughout the process.
- 1.4 On 17<sup>th</sup> June 2019 and again on 20<sup>th</sup> December the Home Office wrote to Local Authorities advising that a new Resettlement Scheme was to be established broadening the geographical focus beyond the Middle East and North Africa region. This was followed by a request from COSLA that Council's state whether they will continue to support the scheme under the revised arrangements and provide a sense of scale of that commitment.
- 1.5 In addition to normal state benefits, the Home Office provide funding for each refugee (£20,520) over the 60 months they are registered on the scheme. This is to support integration and language development. Costs can vary depending upon the composition of families and their individual needs. The children of refugees born in the United Kingdom do not qualify for this funding.
- 1.6 The Home Office have only confirmed that existing funding would be maintained for those refugees entering during the first year of the new scheme across the 60 months, commencing in 2020/21. While exact numbers are not yet known it is expected that circa 5,000 refugees would

be allocated across the United Kingdom in that initial year. This is in addition to the 20,000 who have entering under the existing scheme.

- 1.7 The basis of recommendation (b) is that an additional 10 families is considered necessary to ensure the scheme remains economically viable in that there is no additional cost incurred by Scottish Borders Council.
- 1.8 Following the Covid-19 restrictions the scheme has been temporarily suspended and is expected to resume once travel and associated quarantine controls are lifted.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **2.1 I recommend that the Council:-**

- (a) Note the progress regarding the original commitment to take 10 families and**
- (b) Continue to engage in the Resettlement Scheme with a view to taking an additional 10 families subject to appropriate Home Office funding and local resourcing.**

### **3 SYRIAN REFUGEE BACKGROUND AND GUIDANCE**

- 3.1 On behalf of the United Kingdom, the Home Office have a number of existing schemes for resettling refugees, in particular the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme and the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees identifies those most at risk and brings them to the United Kingdom, strict criteria apply. The Scottish Borders Council's involvement has been with the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. Individuals being resettled have been displaced and suffered the consequences of warfighting in their country of origin.
- 3.2 Within the Scottish Borders local selections are made by considering the profiles of eligible families that have been sent to council scheme leads from the Home Office via COSLA. Representatives from NHS, Social Work and Education collaborate to assess prospective families for suitability. Once a match is made arrangements are put in place to bring families to the United Kingdom.
- 3.3 In 2015 the UK Government expanded the scope of the scheme for refugees who had fled the conflict in Syria.
- 3.4 Several sources of information exist to support council's, the Home Office Guidance for Local Authorities and Partners, Funding Instructions for local authorities in the support of the United Kingdom's Resettlement Schemes, and the Scottish Government's New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy. These underpin local arrangements.
- 3.5 In June 2019 Local Authority Leaders received a letter from the Minister of State for Immigration outlining a continued commitment to resettling refugees and the intention to consolidate existing schemes into a new global resettlement scheme. This was followed up with an explanatory briefing note for Local Authorities.
- 3.6 A paper was tabled at the COSLA Leaders meeting in June 2019 entitled Refugee Resettlement providing details of the new scheme and agreement that Local Authorities would be consulted in relation to continued participation.

#### **Current Arrangements**

- 3.7 In a report to Council dated 12<sup>th</sup> November 2015 Scottish Borders Council agreed that the Scottish Borders would participate in the UK Governments scheme for the resettlement of vulnerable refugee families. The number would be based upon the pro rata distribution across Scotland. To February 2020 nine families have been resettled within the Eildon locality.
- 3.8 All families have settled housing, children are enrolled in school/education, health, and benefit obligations have been met. Additional English language classes have been arranged through English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), despite progress this continues to represent the greatest barrier to integration and employment. The Eildon locality was

chosen for the families due to availability of amenities, in particular transport and health.

- 3.9 Home Office funding is provided to Scottish Borders Council for a period of 60 months while each family member qualifies for the scheme. The funding reduces over time and is highest in the first two years when intensive support is required. Families are discouraged from moving to different council areas by the Home Office and may be removed from the scheme should they re-locate. The use of this funding is restricted to providing furnished accommodation, formal language training, interpretation, broader integration and language support, and school classroom assistance. There is additional funding available for the NHS to access.

### **Family Support**

- 3.10 In 2018, as refugee numbers increased support arrangements were strengthened by formally engaging an Arabic speaker. The role can be time consuming and involves a range of specific skills across translation, support and advocacy underpinned by cultural/political awareness.
- 3.11 Currently the direct link between the Arabic speaker, families and services are coordinated through the Community Safety and Community Justice Manager who acts as the conduit for the scheme across a wide network of local partners, in addition to the Home Office and COSLA. This arrangement has worked well to date as corporate experience developed.
- 3.12 Language support is a high priority, in addition to formal classes volunteering has been popular, in particular among the women. A number of the family members have completed and exceeded Entry Level 3 of the formal language training deemed sufficient to function in their everyday life. This has been a significant milestone for the adult learners. The children have become the most proficient in their use of language.
- 3.13 Attendance at Borders College is popular with one past and one present student. Both have studied trade based qualifications.
- 3.14 The duration of the scheme enables families to move from a position of dependence to independence.

### **Personal Integration Plans**

- 3.15 During May and June 2019, the Scottish Refugee Council were commissioned to assist with Personal Integration Plans for each of the existing family members not of school age. This was helpful in providing a level of independence and some external scrutiny around arrangements in the Scottish Borders. Going forward the intention is for these to be developed locally.

### **Future Considerations**

- 3.16 Existing refugee families have been concentrated around the Eildon locality to provide access to amenities and services. Beyond the initial ten families

alternative locations will need to be identified to settle refugees under the new scheme if Scottish Borders Council approves the recommendation. This has implications for transportation, provision of formal language training, schooling, healthcare and other local amenities.

3.17 Social connections and friendships are essential to prevent isolation and assist with integration into the local community.

## **4 IMPLICATIONS**

### **4.1 Financial**

In order for the scheme to self-fund it is necessary to consider the number of refugees coming to the Scottish Borders and the frequency they arrive. Given the experience gained through the initial 9 families a further 10 maintains the economic viability of the scheme.

#### **(a) Existing current regular outgoings**

The additional funding provided by the Home Office has been used to provide:

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) split between Community Learning and Development and Borders College.

Additional dedicated classroom support depending upon the number and specific needs of school age children for the first year after arrival.

Dedicated Arabic Language/Support/Advocacy Worker.

Costs associated with training, travel and integration activities.

Administering the scheme.

#### **(b) Predicted one off payment**

Furnishing each property prior to arrival, food and some initial financial support in advance of benefit claims being made.

### **4.2 Risk and Mitigations**

The report fully describes all the elements of risk that have been identified in relation to this project and no specific additional concerns need to be addressed at this time.

### **4.3 Equalities**

The purpose of this report is to ensure that Scottish Borders Council and its strategic partners fulfil their obligation to those Syrian families settling in the Scottish Borders under the Resettlement Scheme and take a position on future participation.

### **4.4 Acting Sustainably**

None.

#### 4.5 **Carbon Management**

None.

#### 4.6 **Rural Proofing**

None.

#### 4.7 **Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation**

None.

### **5 CONSULTATION**

5.1 The Executive Director Finance & Regulatory, the Monitoring & Chief Legal Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Service Director HR & Communications and the Clerk to the Council will be consulted and their comments have been incorporated into the final report.

5.2 Home Office and the COSLA Migration, Population and Diversity Team.

#### **Approved by**

Stuart Easingwood

**Signature** .....

Chief Social Work and Public Protection Officer

#### **Author(s)**

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#### **Background Papers:**

**Previous Minute Reference:** Scottish Borders Council meeting minutes dated 12 November 2015, Item 7.

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