

The provision and Support to Refugees and Asylum Seekers In Shropshire

Responsible Officer

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This report sets out the position regarding levels of support required for refugees and asylum seekers in Shropshire.

1. Summary

- 1.1 A Cross Party Working Group has been established in Shropshire to respond to the UK Government response to the repatriation scheme for Syrian refugees, as supported by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).
- 1.2 Since the establishment of this working group additional requests are being made of local authorities in different ways. There are now potentially four different cohorts of people that may need support in Shropshire. These are:
 - Refugees under the UNHCR Syrian resettlement programme
 - Asylum seekers.
 - Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) dispersed from Kent County Council.
 - Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) currently in Europe.
- 1.3 These four cohorts of people have different characteristics and different statuses as citizens of the UK. This report will set out the background to each of these groups and the work undertaken to date and any future requirements.

2. Recommendations

- a) That Cabinet consider the progress made to date by the cross party working group and confirm their ongoing commitment to providing support, as appropriate, to Syrian Refugees and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children.

- b) That Cabinet agree to Shropshire supporting up to 10 families under the Syrian repatriation programme managed by UNHCR.
- c) That Cabinet agree to assist Kent with their challenge of supporting up to 2000 children that have arrived there as Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children and that delegated responsibility is allocated to the Director for Children and Young Peoples services in conjunction with the Cross Party Working Group to consider and agree any requests for support.
- d) That Cabinet note that there may be future requests to support UASC as further clarity is provided on the position regarding UASC in Europe.
- e) That Cabinet note the information regarding the Asylum Dispersal Scheme.
- f) That Cabinet agree to the funding being made available for the resettlement of Syrian Refugees being ring fenced within a dedicated cost centre in adult social care to provide support to this group of people over the 5 year term of the funding.

REPORT

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

Equalities and Human Rights

- 3.1 Support to refugees and asylum seekers of all ages is a National and International challenge to assist people displaced through war and conflict in their home countries.

a) Refugees

The UK has agreed to support 20,000 Syrian refugees through the UNHCR Repatriation Scheme to relocate to the UK on a 5 year Humanitarian Visa. This status as a refugee enables the individual to have access to housing, welfare benefits, health, education and work in paid employment.

The Government is providing funding to Local Authorities and Clinical Commissioning Groups to support the 5 year resettlement programme through the overseas aid budget and other funding streams.

Local Authorities are expected to use this funding to provide meet and greet support at the airport of arrival, appropriate housing, and 12 months of support, interpretation and translation services and English language classes. The funding is also to be used to meet any non-complex social care needs.

b) Asylum Seekers

Asylum seekers would be supported through a regional contract commissioned by Central Government as part of the Asylum Dispersal Scheme.

Shropshire is not currently part of this scheme although there is growing pressure from the regional authorities in the West Midlands that the dispersal should be more equally shared across all local authorities due to the large numbers of asylum seekers in the UK.

Asylum seekers will have no status in the UK until their request for asylum has been heard. During the period from arrival through to outcome of the asylum status decision they will be supported and housed by a national provider who will identify, obtain and manage accommodation and provide a basic subsistence allowance. Asylum seekers will have access to health care and education but will not have the right to work or to benefits through the welfare benefits system.

Local Authorities will not receive any additional funding should Asylum seekers be placed in their local authority area.

c) Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) dispersed from Kent County Council

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children are treated as Looked After Children (LAC) and are entitled to access services and education as UK Looked After Children.

Each UK local authority has been asked to consider accepting young people from Kent who have received around 2000 young unaccompanied people as child asylum seekers.

d) Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) currently in Europe

Further guidance is awaited on this group of young people and how local authorities may be required to support.

Engagement and Consultation

- 3.2 The West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership (WMSMP) are co-ordinating the acceptance of Syrian refugees to the West Midlands and maintaining regular contact with the Home Office.

The WMSMP have held two engagement events with West Midlands local authorities and officers and Councillors from Shropshire Council have attended these. Both events have provided the opportunity for discussion and Question and Answer sessions with officers from local authorities with previous experience in supporting Syrian refugee resettlement, experienced support providers such as Refugee Action, representatives from the Home Office and most recently the Minister with responsibility for Syrian refugee resettlement.

The WMSMSP is also the lead body for Home Office contact regarding the Asylum Dispersal scheme and their role is extending to supporting Local Authorities in responding to the requests for UASC support. Shropshire has had one meeting with WMSMP regarding the Asylum Dispersal scheme.

The West Midlands ADCSS are in contact with both Kent Local Authority and WMSMP regarding UASC.

Shropshire has maintained a continual dialogue with local citizens regarding refugees and asylum seekers through its web site <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/syrian-refugee-support/>. The many offers of support from the general public have been collated and will be shared with the organisation appointed to support Syrian refugee resettlement in Shropshire.

Regular media and press release communications are being issued by the Council providing regular updates on our progress in Shropshire. Additionally officers are meeting local support groups who have offered to extend their support to Refugee arrivals in Shropshire.

The Cross Party Working group consists of Councillors from across all the political parties and representatives from the Voluntary and Community sector (VCS) Shropshire CCG, Police, Fire service and Public Health.

4. Financial Implications

Refugees

- 4.1 Initial funding guidance received in 2015 has been recently revised following consultation with Councils who have had significant experience in resettling Refugees.
- 4.2 The Funding assists with costs incurred by Local Authorities in providing support to refugees. Education and Health Funding will flow through the normal per capita funding routes.
- 4.3 In year one funding will be from the Overseas Development Budget to fund costs for Syrian refugees on a per person per tariff basis. The year one tariff is £8520 for direct local authority costs. There is also additional support for complex educational and medical needs allocated on a case by case basis. The refugee will also be able to access welfare benefits and other public services.
- 4.4 In years 2 to 5 the costs borne by the local authority are calculated on a per person tariff. It will be paid to local authorities as an un-ring-fenced grant to assist with costs incurred in supporting refugees. The local authority may determine the best use of the funds to support the refugees in their area and could include access to English language

training, specific family support or support for local integration initiatives.

- 4.5 Existing funding mechanisms will be used to provide funding for schools and health services required by refugees.

Funding in years 2 to 5 is on a tapering basis as follows:

Year 2 tariff is £5,000

Year 3 tariff is £3,700

Year 4 tariff is £2,300

Year 5 tariff is £1,000

- 4.6 In addition there is a national extreme cases fund that can be accessed on a case by case basis which is worth 15% of the overall tariff costs each year. For the period 2016/17 to 2019/20 it is estimated that this will be £16.5 million.

Asylum Seekers

There is no additional funding support for Local Authorities. Should the Asylum Dispersal scheme be extended to Shropshire it will be important that we have absolute clarity on what the appointed provider should be providing under their contract.

5. Background

Syrian Refugees

- 5.1 The Syrian refugee resettlement programme has been running for some time focusing on women, children and the most vulnerable. The UK Government has pledged to repatriate 20,000 refugees through the UNHCR repatriation programme. (For clarity 20,000 refugees relates to individuals not families, a typical family unit is 6).
- 5.2 There have been concerns expressed by local authorities involved in taking the first cohorts of people regarding potential ongoing health and social care costs associated with the previous cohort, due to their level of need and vulnerability. However this is now reduced as a typical cohort to any LA would be 80/20 split with 20% requiring the most complex health and social care support.
- 5.3 Previous resettlement has typically meant arrivals at regional airports, this will change to charter flights into one or two main airports with LA's arranging onward coach transfer direct to local accommodation. The emphasis is on immediate settlement into local communities with no "holding" accommodation and Shropshire is developing its plans based on this with "pre and post arrival" sections of the action plan being developed.
- 5.4 Health screening, matching to accommodation, biometrics, and security screening, health checks and vaccinations, resettlement and integration training (what to expect in the UK) and matching to urban/rural areas

occurs out of the UK. We will be able to refuse an allocated refugee if we are unable to meet their needs. Primarily refugees will be matched to accommodation availability.

- 5.5 Resettlement guidance has been made available and this was updated in March 2015 which has been confirmed as the most current guidance.

Asylum Dispersal

- 5.6 This was set out in a letter to the Authority on 24 August 2015. This is a separate area to Syrian refugee resettlement.
- 5.7 At a West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership meeting (WMSMP) in autumn 2015 information was provided about the asylum dispersal scheme.
- 5.8 This included a key message that the Home Office have concluded that the current geography of asylum dispersal needs to be widened with all LA's expected to co-operate with asylum seeker dispersal at some point.
- 5.9 Asylum dispersal is supported by the Government through the appointment of regional providers. To put Asylum seeking into context the Asylum and Immigration Act 1999, and its provisions, was introduced with the intention of sharing the impact of dispersals of asylum seekers across the UK and to ease the over reliance on any one area. Seven Local Authorities have supported asylum dispersal within the West Midlands region since its introduction in 2000, engaging positively with the Home Office and its providers to find appropriate accommodation solutions.
- 5.10 The Home Office will support any local authority areas identified as having suitable housing markets and who indicate a willingness to assist to develop solutions that are suitable to their local area. Home Office funding covers the cost of housing, subsistence for asylum seekers and some wider ancillary services.

6.0 What's happening in Shropshire?

- 6.1 A range of offers of support have been received from the public and community groups, these range from the offer of accommodation in a person's own home, to translation services as well as practical support and collection of goods for distribution.
- 6.2 A universal mail box has been set up and published to manage correspondence. refugeesshropshire@shropshire.gov.uk this has a standard message confirming response time to queries (3 days), thanking people for offers of support and signposting to other opportunities for people to offer help, practical support and make donations.

- 6.3 Accommodation is also being identified and to date we have received 3 positive offers of accommodation in the Oswestry areas from a private a sector landlord. We will develop our first offer to the Home Office based on this accommodation.
- 6.4 We have also completed a procurement process to identify a support provider able to meet the resettlement requirements and provide the required support for 12 months, interpretation services, meet/ greet and transfer services and undertake Home Office liaison and complete returns as required. The contract negotiations are currently being concluded.
- 6.5 Subject to Home Office approval and acceptance of our now firm offer, (previously we have pledged our support), we anticipate arrivals of refugees in Shropshire sometime in April or possibly early May 2016.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 Shropshire is now well placed to accept the first small cohort of refugees to the County. The cross party working group have met on a 2 weekly basis to develop plans and engage with partners and stakeholders.
- 7.2 The support from the Public has been both supportive and generous and there are now a number of small groups that have established themselves to assist refugees both in Shropshire and also overseas.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder) Councillor Mal Price

Local Member All – this is a Countywide matter
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Appendices
