



Shropshire Council  
Legal and Democratic Services  
Shirehall  
Abbey Foregate  
Shrewsbury  
SY2 6ND

Date: Tuesday, 3 April 2018

**Committee: Cabinet**

**Date: Wednesday, 11 April 2018**

**Time: 12.30 pm**

**Venue: Shrewsbury Room, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY2 6ND**

You are requested to attend the above meeting.

The Agenda is attached

Claire Porter  
Head of Legal and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer)

**Members of Cabinet**

Peter Nutting (Leader)  
Steve Charmley (Deputy Leader)  
Joyce Barrow  
Lezley Picton  
David Minnery  
Robert Macey  
Nic Laurens  
Nicholas Bardsley  
Lee Chapman  
Steve Davenport

**Deputy Members of Cabinet**

Clare Aspinall  
Dean Carroll  
Rob Gittins  
Roger Hughes  
Elliott Lynch  
Alex Phillips  
Simon Harris

Your Committee Officer is:

**Jane Palmer** Senior Democratic Services Officer

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# AGENDA

## 1 Apologies for Absence

## 2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Members are reminded that they must not participate in the discussion or voting on any matter in which they have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest and should leave the room prior to the commencement of the debate.

## 3 Minutes

To approve as a correct record and sign the Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 21 March 2018. **TO FOLLOW**

## 4 Public Question Time

To receive any questions or petitions from members of the public, notice of which has been given in accordance with Procedure Rule 14. Deadline for notification for this meeting is no later than 24 hours prior to the commencement of the meeting, i.e. by 12.30pm on Tuesday 10 April 2018.

## 5 Member Questions

To receive any questions of which members of the Council have given due notice. Deadline for notification for this meeting is 5.00pm on Friday 6 April 2018.

## 6 Scrutiny Items (Pages 1 - 14)

To receive feedback from the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee on issues considered at its meeting on 28 March 2018:

- i) The recent call ins on a) The Parking Strategy and b) Local Commissioning of Youth Activities [update report **TO FOLLOW**]
- ii) The report of the Rapid Action Group on Refuges for Victims of Domestic Abuse, attached.

## 7 Resettlement of Syrian Refugees (Pages 15 - 24)

Lead Member – Councillor Lee Chapman – Portfolio Holder for Health and Adult Social Care

Report of the Director of Adult Services

Contact: Andy Begley      Tel: 01743 258911

**8 Proposed Consultation on the Shropshire Council Better Regulation and Enforcement Policy**

Lead Member – Councillor Robert Macey – Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services

Report of the Director of Public Health **TO FOLLOW**

Contact: Professor Rod Thomson      Tel: 01743 258918

**9 New Parking Strategy Framework Part 2 - Residents Parking Policy Framework**

Lead Member – Councillor Steve Davenport – Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport

Report of the Director of Place and Enterprise **TO FOLLOW**

Contact: George Candler    Tel: 01743 258671

**10 Whitchurch Civic Centre Asset Transfer**

Lead Member – Councillor Steve Charmley – Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Corporate Support

Report for the Director of Place and Enterprise **TO FOLLOW**

Contact: George Candler    Tel: 01743 258671



<u>Committee and Date</u>
Performance Management Scrutiny Committee 28 <sup>th</sup> March 2018
Cabinet 11 April 2018

## **Report from the Rapid Action Group on Refuges for Victims of Domestic Abuse**

**Responsible Officer** Danial Webb, Overview and Scrutiny Officer  
Email [daniel.webb@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:daniel.webb@shropshire.gov.uk)  
Phone (01743) 258509

### **1.0 Summary**

1.1 This paper presents the report of the Rapid Action Group on Refuges for Victims of Domestic Abuse to the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee. Their work has focussed on the funding available for refuges and support services for victims of domestic abuse, and the impact of changes to funding for all supported housing. The Rapid Action Group has developed its conclusions and recommendations based on the evidence gathered through its work.

### **2.0 Recommendations**

#### **2.1 Recommendation 1**

That the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee explore opportunities for CAMHS to offer acute support to children who were staying in domestic abuse refuges.

#### **2.2 Recommendation 2**

That Shropshire Council request that the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee explore opportunities for working more closely with Telford and Wrekin Council to deliver domestic abuse support services.

#### **2.3 Recommendation 3**

That Shropshire Council respond to the government's consultation on housing costs for short-term supported accommodation, asking that the Government postpones these proposals until such time as there is more certainty about the proposed domestic abuse legislation.

## **REPORT**

### **3.0 Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal**

#### **3.1 Assessment of risk**

Proposed changes to funding for domestic abuse refuges would mean that refuges would no longer be able to claim housing benefit on behalf of eligible people who were staying in them. They would instead have to rely to a far greater extent on funding from Shropshire Council, who would instead receive block funding for all supported housing. There is no guarantee however that funding would cover all of the needs of the competing refuges and hostels, jeopardising the viability of services.

#### **3.2 Assessment of opportunities**

Block funding for all supported housing by Government would give Shropshire Council the ability to co-ordinate and plan local supported housing.

### **4.0 Financial implications**

4.1 Shropshire Council currently provides approximately £185,000 annually to fund domestic abuse support services. As these services are not a statutory obligation, changes to government funding will not necessarily have any financial implications to Shropshire Council. They may however have considerable impact on domestic abuse support services if Shropshire Council can no longer provide the required level of funding.

### **5.0 Background**

5.1 On 14 December 2017 the following motion was proposed to council:

*The government proposals to remove Domestic Abuse Refuges and other forms of short-term supported housing from the welfare system.*

*On average housing benefit makes up 53% of the funding to refuges that provide a vital, sometimes life-saving service to vulnerable women and children fleeing abusive partners.*

...

*The government proposal will see housing benefit replaced with a grant to local authorities. However there is no proposal to ring fence this for particular forms of short-term supported housing. In addition many people*

*fleeing domestic violence and abuse need to relocate, and so may stay in areas where they have little or no local connection, with the possibility that the response from local authorities to their short-term housing needs will become uneven at best.*

*Council resolves to instruct the Chief Executive and Leader to make representations to government calling on them to remove this proposal and retain access to housing benefit for those in short-term supported housing to help secure the future of this vital service.*

5.2 Following a debate, Council agreed to the following motion:

*Central Government has proposed changes to Housing Benefit for people in women's refuges and temporary accommodation. These have the potential to have a significant impact on those individuals within Shropshire and how Shropshire Council is able to meet their needs.*

*Shropshire Council believes we need to drill down in to this issue to understand its impact. Therefore this Council resolves to refer this issue to the Welfare Reform Task & Finish Group to review and inform any response we need to make through the setting up of a one-day Rapid Action Group as soon as possible to specifically look into this.*

5.3 Accordingly, Overview and Scrutiny set up a Rapid Action Group to:

- Find out more about the nature and prevalence of domestic abuse, both nationally and in Shropshire;
- Learn about the support services available in Shropshire for survivors of domestic abuse and their families;
- gain a deeper understanding of domestic abuse by hearing from survivors of abuse;
- understand how support services are funded, and the proposed changes to government funding; and
- agree recommendations to help ensure the future viability of support services.

## **6.0 The Rapid Action Group**

6.1 The Rapid Action Group met on 16 January 2018. It was chaired by the chair of the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee and consisted of a number of members of Shropshire Council's overview and scrutiny committees.

To assist the group in their work, the following people attended the meeting:

- Committee Officer, Shropshire Council
- Overview and Scrutiny Officer, Shropshire Council
- Community Safety Manager, Shropshire Council
- Benefits Manager, Shropshire Council
- Manager, Shropshire Domestic Abuse Service
- Support Worker, SEEDS Shropshire
- Domestic Abuse Survivor Advocates, SEEDS Shropshire

6.2 As part of its work, it considered the following evidence:

- An overview of the prevalence of domestic abuse, both nationally and within Shropshire.
- Details of proposed changes to funding for short-term supported accommodation
- A presentation from Shropshire Domestic Abuse Service on the history of support for victims of domestic abuse in Shropshire.
- An overview of funding arrangements to tackle domestic abuse in Shropshire.
- Accounts of using support services from survivors of domestic abuse.

## **7.0 Findings of the Rapid Action Group**

### **7.1 Prevalence of domestic abuse**

The group heard that the Crime Survey for England and Wales 2017 calculated that in the year to March 2017 1.9 million adults aged 16-59 experienced some form of domestic abuse, either from their partners or from other family members. Of these, approximately 1.2 million adults were women, and 700,000 were men. This equated to 7.5% of women and 4.3% of men aged 16-59 in England and Wales. Women were twice as likely to experience violence from an intimate partner, and 20% more likely to experience threats or force from a family member.

In the year to March 2017, West Mercia Police recorded 2,186 domestic abuse offences in the borough, concentrated in Shrewsbury, Oswestry, Market Drayton and Ludlow. This was an increase of 22% compared to the previous year. However the Office for National Statistics had noted that “this increase is likely to be, in part, driven by an increase in domestic abuse-related incidents coming to the attention of the police, improvements in crime recording practices and an increased willingness of victims to come forward.” It had pointed out that the Crime Survey for England and Wales did not measure a similar increase.



Across the force area, West Mercia Police pursued 1,703 prosecutions, equivalent to 14% of all criminal prosecutions. Within the police force area there were also 1,352 convictions, equivalent to 79% of all prosecutions for domestic violence made by the police.

- 7.2 The group also considered other evidence concerning the prevalence of domestic abuse. In the year to March 2017, the borough's multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) recorded 319 higher risk cases of domestic abuse. 182 of these were referred by the police, and 61 by health services.

In addition, West Mercia Women's Aid's Independent Domestic Abuse Advisers supported 280 clients in the county of Shropshire. In addition, Shropshire Domestic Abuse Service (SDAS) is commissioned by Shropshire Council to provide a refuge and longer-term outreach service to between 80-100 clients each year. West Mercia Women's Aid's 24 hour Domestic Abuse helpline received 1600 calls in the year to 2018, and made 1300 calls on behalf of clients. It is not clear the extent of the overlap between these three client groups, but it is likely to be significant.

7.3 **Domestic abuse refuge and support services in Shropshire**

SDAS runs a 10-bedroom refuge for women only, as well as two-bedroom property that can accommodate anyone. A further three-bedroom property will become operational in 2018. A family unit typically occupies a single room, irrespective of the size of the family.

- 7.4 Between 1 April and 20 December 2017 42 woman and 55 children used the refuges, only 40% of whom came from within Shropshire. Unlike some local authorities, Shropshire Council did not restrict access to SDAS refuge and support services to those living within the council area. Although people from elsewhere used the service, Shropshire was not a popular destination for people fleeing abuse due to its relative geographical isolation and lack of comprehensive services. Accordingly SDAS were careful to explain life in Shropshire to those coming from larger, more urban, culturally diverse towns and cities.

Members supported the principle that SDAS services were available to those from outside the local authority area, and expressed concern that moving to a service that was commissioned and funded by the local authority may result in the service being available only to Shropshire residents.

- 7.5 As well as refuge space, SDAS also organise a range of support services both for people staying in refuges and the wider population. These services

include support to access housing, training, employment and benefits, as well as counselling and advocacy.

Both West Mercia Women's Aid and SDAS employ independent domestic violence advocates (IDVAs), support workers who specialise in working with victims of domestic abuse who are assessed as being at high risk of harm. IDVAs work closely with agencies such as the police, children's services and legal advisors on behalf of the victim.

7.6 While demand for refuge space is steady, there has been a steady increase in demands for support services. Last year West Mercia Women's Aid's IDVA services represented 280 people, having forecast to support just 200-220 clients. SDAS also reports growing demand which cannot be met with existing services.

7.7 Members discussed whether children who were staying in refuges were able to access NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) as a priority. SDAS confirmed that there is no priority for such children. Some members felt that there ought to be, due to the acute trauma of sudden domestic upheaval following domestic abuse committed against a parent. Other members disagreed, believing that prioritising one cohort of children could possible disadvantage those with greater or even more immediate need.

The group therefore agreed that the matter should be referred to the relevant overview and scrutiny committee to look at in greater detail.

**RECOMMENDATION 1: that the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee explore opportunities for CAMHS to offer acute support to children who were staying in domestic abuse refuges.**

7.8 **Funding domestic abuse services**

Providing a domestic abuse prevention and support service is not a statutory function for local authorities. Nonetheless, since 2008 Shropshire Council has funded domestic abuse refuge and other support services in the county. From April 2017 this service has been contracted to Shropshire Domestic Abuse Service (SDAS), part of Connexus (formerly known as Shropshire Housing Group). The contract is worth £185,000 a year for refuge and support services, and runs for three years until 31 March 2020.

7.9 The refuge funding from Shropshire Council covers non-janitorial support staff wages and expenses. In addition Shropshire Housing claims enhanced Housing Benefit of £270 per week per room in the refuge, covering rent, service charges and intensive housing management. The

people staying in the refuge pay a personal contribution of £16 per week towards heating and lighting, which is not covered by their Housing Benefit. SDAS told the group that these costs were realistic and that they provided a breakdown of the costs when submitting claims for Housing benefit. Because Connexus does not require a rental payment for the lease of the properties to SDAS, the service is able to charge a lower rate of housing benefit than the previous contractors. Accordingly there had been no pressure from the Department for Work and Pensions to reduce these costs.

- 7.10 Based on the 2017 occupancy rate of 82% for the two refuges, SDAS received Housing Benefit income of approximately £130,000 in 2017. In 2018 that will rise to approximately £160,000, assuming a similar occupancy of 15 rooms. Officers advised the group that if the government followed through with its proposal to replace housing benefit for people living in refuges with a block grant, SDAS would require additional funding of approximately £215,000 a year to maintain the current service.
- 7.11 In addition to the funding from Shropshire Council, and housing benefit income, SDAS has funding for a number of mostly time-limited projects:
- £115,000 from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), to be spent over two years from 2018. This will pay for 1 full-time officer to provide outreach services in Telford and Wrekin, 1 full-time officer to provide specific outreach for black and minority ethnic people throughout Shropshire, and five hours per week of administrative support.
  - £26,000 also from DCLG, to provide specialist psychotherapy services. This award is not time-limited.
  - £124,000 from Children in Need, to be spent over three years until 2019, to pay for 1.5 full-time officers to provide specific support for children.
  - £32,000 from Shropshire Council, to provide 12 hours a week of administrative support to SEEDS, a survivor-led group support project, until March 2020.
- 7.12 In addition, the West Mercia police and crime commissioner (PCC) funds two West Mercia Women's Aid projects, which Shropshire residents can use:
- £35,000 to pay for a specialist support worker for children and young period, for one year until March 2018.
  - £180,000 to increase the capacity of West Mercia Women's Aid's 24 hour Domestic Abuse helpline, for two years until January 2018.

The PCC also commissions the IDVA service from West Mercia Women's

Aid. There are two IDVAs in Shropshire and another post is shared with Telford and Wrekin to provide administrative support.

- 7.13 Members noted that different funding streams applied to different geographical boundaries. Although most funding covered services within the Shropshire Council area, a grant from DCLG funded work across Shropshire. Police and Crime Commissioner funding covered services across the West Mercia area.

Members asked whether there was any opportunity for closer working with Telford and Wrekin Council. Officers advised that Telford and Wrekin Council preferred to run its own services. Members however noted that if domestic abuse services moved to being funded directly by the local authority, it may be more cost-effective to run a single service covering the entire county. Members therefore recommended that Shropshire Council begin to explore this through its joint scrutiny with Telford and Wrekin Council.

**RECOMMENDATION 2: That the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee explore opportunities for working more closely with Telford and Wrekin Council to deliver domestic abuse support services.**

7.14 **Listening to survivors of domestic abuse**

Two members of SEEDS, the survivor-led support network, came to the group meeting to talk about their experiences of using domestic abuse support services. Although both women had very different backgrounds, several themes emerged from their stories. Neither woman had wanted to use the refuge, but was forced to do so due to the immediate threat to their safety. Both women described a feeling of loss; of contact with friends and family, of their clothes and other possessions, of work and their daily routines. However for them this loss was more than compensated for by a sense of safety from harm.

- 7.15 Both women were now involved in the SEEDS survivors' network, supporting others who were victims of domestic abuse.

- 7.16 Members asked the members of SEEDS about the support they had received from the local authority and its partners. One survivor told the group that she had received considerable support from the police, who had alerted her to the imminent threat to her safety that caused her to flee. They had also escorted her when she needed to return home to collect possessions.

One of the survivors, because she was not eligible for Housing Benefit as she owned her own home, had to cover all of the costs of her stay at the refuge herself. This limited the time that she was able to stay at the refuge.

Both survivors had completed the Freedom Programme, which aims to help women who are victims of domestic abuse, and found it incredibly useful in teaching them that they were not at fault for the abuse that they suffered. One woman had completed the course previously, while still in an abusive relationship, at the request of her social worker. However, she had not wanted to attend and had not engaged with the course. Once she had recognised the relationship as being abusive, she was much more receptive to taking part in the programme. SDAS told the group that Shropshire Council was far less likely now to compel people to attend the programme.

#### **7.17 Changes to funding for women's refuges**

In October 2017 the Department for Communities and Local Government, in conjunction with the Department for Work and Pensions, issued a joint policy statement on funding supported housing. It proposed to replace existing arrangements for funding through Housing Benefit to a local, ring-fenced grant fund for short-term and transitional supported housing, including supported housing for:

- homeless people with support needs
- people fleeing domestic abuse
- people receiving support for drug and alcohol misuse
- offenders and young people at risk and
- care leavers

This change would mean that domestic abuse refuges would no longer be able to claim housing benefit for eligible people who were staying in refuges, and would instead have to rely to a far greater extent on funding from the Council. At the same time as publishing the policy statement, the government had announced a consultation on these proposals.

7.18 Members asked whether people using refuges could apply for funding from the Discretionary Housing Payments fund, rather than apply for Housing Benefit. Officers advised that they could only do so if they were entitled to either Housing Benefit or the housing component for Universal Credit.

7.19 It was noted that the government's proposal to move to a grant-based system would allow the local authority to determine the contribution that each person using the refuge would make. This could mean that people who were not eligible for Housing Benefit would not necessarily have to cover the entire cost of staying at the refuge.

Members expressed concern that such a move could jeopardise the viability of existing services. The grant fund could put refuges in competition for funding with other support services, and there would be no guarantee that the grant fund would cover the needs of every service. In addition, unless the proposed grant fund was not ring-fenced specifically for refuge space, Council could decide at a later date to not fund domestic abuse refuges at all.

- 7.20 The group noted that the government had proposed to introduce a draft domestic violence and abuse bill to parliament. Although the government had given some indications about the contents of the draft bill, it had published neither a draft bill nor a white paper on the proposed legislation. This indicated that the government was proposing significant changes to how it funded domestic abuse before it had decided on changes to underlying legislation. Members felt that the government should therefore delay any changes to the current funding system until the proposed legislation had received royal assent.

**RECOMMENDATION 3: That Shropshire Council respond to the government’s consultation on housing costs for short-term supported accommodation, asking that the Government postpones these proposals until such time as there is more certainty about the proposed domestic abuse legislation.**

#### **List of Background Papers**

- Performance Management Scrutiny Committee Housing Benefit for Refuges Rapid Action Group Terms of Reference
- Rapid Action Group briefing note
- Crime Survey England and Wales 2012-2017
- West Mercia Police reported crime data 2016-2017
- multi agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) 2017 data
- West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner: grants awarded 2015-2017
- Department for Communities and Local Government and Department for Work and Pensions: Funding Supported Housing – Policy Statement and Consultation
- Shropshire Community Safety, Crime Reduction and Drug and Alcohol Strategy 2017 - 2020

#### **Cabinet Member**

Cllr Lee Chapman– Portfolio Holder for Health and Adult Social Care

<b>Local Members</b> All Members
<b>Appendices</b> Shropshire Council response to consultation on funding for supported housing

## **Appendix 1: Shropshire Council response to consultation on funding for supported housing**

In October 2017 the Department for Communities and Local Government, in conjunction with the Department for Work and Pensions, consulted on proposals to replace existing arrangements for funding through Housing Benefit to a local, ring-fenced grant fund for short-term and transitional supported housing.

The rapid action group responded to this consultation on behalf of Shropshire Council as follows:

*Shropshire Council is responding to the proposals for changes to the funding of housing costs for short-term supported housing. We have concerns that these proposals could have a significant impact on the sustainability of refuge provision for victims and their families leaving violent relationships. We would also strongly suggest that this consultation is premature, given the government's proposals to introduce a domestic violence and abuse bill to Parliament later this year.*

*The element of the proposed changes that will impact upon refuge provision is the establishment of the Local Grant Fund for Short-term and Transitional Supported Housing.*

*The proposals are designed to place the scale and shape of refuge provision for the victims of domestic abuse entirely within the scope of local decision-making. This will add to the vulnerability currently felt by providers – not because they cannot show both quality and the capacity to meet local need, but because they will be completely dependent upon local authorities at a time when councils themselves have insufficient capacity to meet local need and plan for the future.*

*The proposal requires the undertaking of further strategic planning by local authorities and partners at a time when their capacity to do so is under immense pressure, in order to produce a supported housing strategic plan that will place all short-term supported housing within the same frame and budget envelope. Local authorities will then be required to prioritise on the basis of local need, placing refuge provision in even greater competition with a range of other supported housing provision than it is at present. This will be at a time when, additional funding notwithstanding, local authority resources are already insufficient to meet local need*

*This proposal also comes at a time when the Government is simultaneously working on landmark legislation designed to tackle domestic abuse. The*



*Council believes that until this legislation receives Royal assent, it is inappropriate to make such significant changes to the existing funding arrangements. As well as creating the risk that the changes will not be appropriate for future legislation, it also risks creating instability to services twice over; once with these proposed changes and again when the proposed bill comes into force.*

*Shropshire Council therefore ask that the Government postpones these proposals until such time as their certainty about the proposed domestic abuse legislation.*

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## Committee and Date

Cabinet

11<sup>th</sup> April 2018

## **RESETTLEMENT OF SYRIAN REFUGEES**

Responsible Officer: Andy Begley  
e-mail: andy.begley@shropshire.gov.uk Tel: 01743 258911

### **1. Summary**

- This report sets out the current context relating to Syrian resettlement in Shropshire Local Authority Area.
- It focuses on the 15 families already resettled throughout Shropshire along with the joint working with Children's Services regarding Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children.
- It also notes the request by UK Visa's and Immigration (UKVI) for Shropshire to consider Asylum Dispersal within Shropshire.

### **2. Recommendations**

- To agree a further commitment to resettle 10 Syrian families during 2018/19.
- To agree a response to UKVI in regard to the request for Shropshire to commit to Asylum Dispersal in Shropshire.

## **REPORT**

### **3. Context – National**

The Syrian refugee resettlement programme has been running nationally for some time focusing on women, children and the most vulnerable individuals in need. However, the announcement of 20,000 refugees widened the scheme's criteria. (For clarity 20,000 refugees relates to individuals not families).

A Cross Party Working Group was established in Shropshire to respond to the Syrian refugee crisis and to support the Syrian resettlement programme which will support 20,000 people to resettle in the UK.

The group consists of Councillors representing each of the political parties, Shropshire Council Adult Services, Children's Services, Safeguarding and Housing services,

Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly, West Mercia Police, Shropshire CCG and Shropshire Fire and Rescue service.

Shropshire Council committed to the resettling of 15 Syrian families in the County. This equated to 63 individuals being welcomed into the County between June 2016 - March 2017. The families have been resettled in 4 different locations throughout the County – Oswestry (5 families), Shrewsbury (5 families), Wem (3 families) and Much Wenlock (2 families).

Local Authorities are given dates in advance of when cohorts of families are to arrive, with approximately 4 weeks' notice of which families are suitable for their area. Local Authorities are able to consider numerous families to ensure they can meet the need ie, school places, health needs etc and refuse families they do not believe they can support.

Arrivals involve charter flights arriving at a central airport, families being met by representatives from the local authorities and onward coach transfers direct to accommodation. The emphasis is on immediate settlement into local communities with no "holding" accommodation and Shropshire has engaged with this fully by ensuring all families have permanent accommodation.

One family from Wem has opted to move to Birmingham as they had friends and family already settled in this area. This reduced individuals to 59. However we have welcomed 2 births in 2017 with a further 2 due in 2018 taking the total individuals back up to 63.

#### **4. Context – Shropshire**

With 13 of the 15 families having now exited Refugee Action support (the final 2 families leave at the end of March 2018) the families are now engaging with mainstream support. The end of the first 12 months is a point at which we can review the past 12 months and how far they have come. Refugee Action staff and volunteers hold a small party with all the families to celebrate the integration and resettlement achievements they have made in the UK – from being picked up at the airport on that initial day to where they are now.

The first week is full of intensive support delivered by Refugee Action staff and volunteers, including important activities to settle the refugees into their new community such as introducing the refugees to their new home, and housing officer; getting to know their local area; meeting their GP; navigating the benefits system at the Job Centre; discovering UK food stuffs & supermarkets; and meeting the Welcome Groups.

At the end of the 12 months the families are well equipped for the transition to year 2 in the UK, but when needed, future help is in place from Sustain support workers, Welcome's Groups, Enable and other mainstream services where required.

#### *Legal;*

- All families have received two appointments of Immigration Advice along with support to change their Humanitarian Protection Status to Refugee Status;
- A few families have been assisted to replace their Biometric Residence Permit due to loss or a spelling error.

### *Employment & Volunteering;*

- Many of the men and women are volunteering in the community including one client who is working for a community transport company who have supported him to pass his UK driving test;
- Several clients took their Theory Driving Test in Belfast with Arabic support and passed. Many clients are working hard with Welcome Groups to pass the Theory & Practical driving test in English;
- The Job Centre has told us that the refugees are actively seeking work, but language continues to be a barrier. Enable have been commissioned to assist with preparation for work sessions and work placements in order to improve conversational and work related English language skills.

### *Education & English Language;*

- Each adult is averaging about 6 hours ESOL a week. The children have settled well in schools, and the families are engaging with the school and school event & activities. The young people are delighted to be attending college, and their English language skills are greatly improved.

### *Housing;*

- Most families have settled well into their neighborhood and with support have addressed any issues. All families are now receiving tenancy support via Sustain.

### *Health and Wellbeing;*

- The families have been supported to attend numerous NHS appointments including GP's and dentists. It was challenging to ensure the NHS arrange for interpreters to attend appointments, but in partnership with the CCG this has now improved;
- One woman is deeply concerned about her father back home who has cancer. It's affecting her wellbeing. She is receiving informal support as she is reluctant to engage with anything formal as it's unfamiliar to her;
- Another client was devastated when his brother was severely injured in a bombing in Syria. He has been offered emotional and practical support with this upsetting situation.

### *Benefits and Finance*

- The families have been supported to navigate the Benefits system and this will continue as we see the rollout of Universal Credit. They have worked in partnership with the Council Benefits department and the Citizen's Advice Bureau.

### *Social and Relationships*

- The Welcome's Groups have assisted the families to engage with their local community and neighbours with many stories of neighbours and friends assisting them to attend sessions such as swimming, coffee mornings and school events.
- Many of the families have helped at school events with some running a stall selling Syrian food.

### *Media*

- There have been several positive stories in the local and national press which have been coordinated between Shropshire Council and Refugee Action.

### *Hate Crime*

- Generally, the families have been welcomed and have not experienced hate crime.

## **5. Planning for the future**

During the first 12 months of being in Shropshire, all of the families have been supported by Refugee Action who were the commissioned service for the resettlement of the families. Refugee Action undertake significant work with the families including pre-arrival planning to ensure all is in place for families' arrival, meeting the refugees at the airport and settling them into their accommodation, arranging and supporting them to attend initial appointments with GPs and DWP and with initial orientation in their local area. Supporting them to set up bank accounts, budget, integrate into their local community, access and attend ESOL among other areas. Refugee Action's approach is based around an empowerment model whereby refugees are encouraged to be as independent as possible to ensure they are better able to integrate to their local communities.

An operational group was set up to discuss the arrival of families, as well as their ongoing integration. This group allowed Refugee Action to link in with numerous departments within Shropshire Council to ensure a smooth transition for the families in regard to Housing Benefit and Council Tax claims. It has also meant a fortnightly update on how the families were doing, as well as strengthening working relationships to enable us to deal with any incidents such as behaviour of children in schools or emergency hospital appointments.

Before the families arrived in Shropshire there were 2 welcomes groups set up. One in Oswestry (Oswestry Welcomes Refugees) and one in Shrewsbury (Shropshire Welcomes Refugees). Between them they have in excess of 500 registered volunteer's willing and able to support the families with a range of issues. In essence the welcome's groups complement the commissioned Resettlement services provided by Refugee Action. They have access to a number of interpreters and translators who have proved invaluable when setting up benefits, applying for PIP claims and resolving issues with their properties. As many of the families move into year 2 the welcomes groups have applied for and been successful in being awarded grant funding to pick up some of service that were provided by Refugee Action during year 1.

Shropshire has a tight knit but wide reaching network of support available for the Syrian families. There are people who support them daily, through to those who only dip in when needed. The infrastructure is supportive of all the families, as well as professionals involved. We have had organised parties, trips to Ireland to undertake an Arabic driving test, babysitting and fundraising events galore! I believe the structure and organisation around our Syrian families that has developed in Shropshire over the past 24 months is a testament to the positivity of Shropshire and the welcoming nature of the residents.

12 of the remaining 14 families have now moved into year 2 of their resettlement in the UK. This has meant that the support from Refugee Action has ended and they are reliant on mainstream support. All the families in Shropshire have been well-equipped for this transition due to the type of support received in Year 1 which has focussed on fostering their independence. As such, the 'step-down' of support has come at an appropriate time to support their continued integration into Shropshire communities. All the families who have entered into year 2 have access to a Sustain support worker who they see approximately every 1 – 2 weeks. I have set up an operational meeting where I meet with the Sustain workers every 2 months to discuss any issues arising with the families and I am the point of contact for any concerns they may have.

The welcome groups have both recently applied for and been successful in being awarded grant funding to assist them as organisations to continue. Their aim is to work specifically

with the families in their patch to ensure they are able to access ESOL and to support them into employment where appropriate. In essence they have picked up where Refugee Action left off, but in a more informal manner.

The majority of the adults have undertaken voluntary work and are keen to engage with paid employment. The issue that arises time and time again is that they have little experience of work in the UK and they need to improve their English. I have therefore liaised with Enable and I am in the process of setting up a contract for them to work with the families to support the adults to access employment through work placements and work experience. The aim is to provide them with skills necessary for the workplace as well as improve their conversational English to assist them in being more suitable for employment.

Shropshire Council is prime to accept more families and further assist with the resettlement of families. Refugee Action is currently working with Children's Services in relation to the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children but this contract has been added on to the one they had relating to the resettlement of the Syrian families and so will end in March 2018.

The main aims and activities of the project are to ensure that young asylum seekers:

- have information about their asylum application, the decision making process and their options at key stages
- are supported in adjusting to life in the UK, building friendships, life skills and support networks in Shropshire and the UK
- have the information and help they need to achieve their personal goals

The project is being delivered by a part time Refugee Action Project Coordinator, working from Shrewsbury and on an outreach basis in Shropshire, with support from a small team of volunteers. It is key that if we are to retain the skills and experience of the Refugee Action support workers that we commit to welcome further families into Shropshire. In essence the resettlement of the Syrian families can assist with the support needed for the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children and initiatives set up for the families can benefit Children's Services and the work they do with the Young People.

Both the welcomes groups are keen to be involved with any future families that resettle in Shropshire and in fact many of the family members are keen to mentor any future families.

## 6. Funding

Below are details of the funding for the full 5 year programme. This funding is ongoing for the time the families are resident in the Shropshire area. Based on our experience of the initial 15 families, this funding enables us to fully support the families with no financial impact on the Local Authority. It is also worth noting that Education and Health apply for money separately to us (see Education figures below).

Based on this we received £536,760 for year one.

<b>UNIT COSTS FOR SYRIAN RESETTLEMENT SCHEME – PER INDIVIDUAL – YEAR ONE ONLY</b>					
	Adult Benefit Claimant	Other Adults	Children 5-18	Children 3-4	Children U.3
<b>Resettlement Costs</b>	£8520	£8520	£8520	£8520	£8520
<b>Education</b>	n/a	n/a	£4500	£2250	£0.00

Below are details of the funding received by the Local Authority for the initial 15 (now 14) families for years 2-5.

Year 2 – £295,000

Year 3 – £218,300

Year 4 – £135,700

Year 5 – £59,000

<b>UNIT COSTS FOR SYRIAN RESETTLEMENT SCHEME – PER INDIVIDUAL</b>				
Timeframe	13-24 Months (Year 2)	25-36 Months (Year 3)	37-48 Months (Year 4)	49-60 Months (Year 5)
Rate	£5,000	£3,700	£2,300	£1,000

Although the funding is specifically to be used for the resettlement and integration of the Syrian families, in Shropshire, we have found that a number of initiatives set up for either the families and / or the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children benefit both groups. This means we are able to work together to benefit a larger group of individuals.

## 7. Asylum Dispersal

The Syrian Refugee Resettlement Programme is not to be confused with the Asylum Dispersal Scheme, although the 2 are both managed by the same Home Office department. Asylum dispersal is supported by the Government through the appointment of regional providers. The provider for the West Midlands is G4S. 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.



The Asylum and Immigration Act 1999, and its provisions, were implemented with the intention and purpose of ensuring that asylum seekers were dispersed across the UK and that no one local authority, area, or region became over-proliferated with those seeking support through the asylum system. The Act also makes direct provision for the Secretary of State to provide support for those claiming asylum and to instruct the cooperation and support of local authorities in doing so.

In a letter received by Shropshire Council on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2017, the Home Office are requesting that Shropshire Council gives their agreement for the placement of an initial cohort of asylum seekers.

The letter goes on to state that UK Visa's and Immigration (UKVI) will work with all local authorities who commit to resettling Asylum Seekers in their area and will be guided by the authority on the numbers that can be supported. Although it needs to be noted that 25 individuals are seen as a minimum.

UKVI also commit to be guided by the Local Authority on the most practicable areas for resettlement, although suggests the area needs to have good transport links and services. The letter goes on to suggest that where Local Authorities have already resettled Syrian families that this would be a good area to consider as the links and support are already in place.

UKVI state they are happy for the roll out to take shape at a pace with which the Local Authority is comfortable. With other new areas this has been over a three to six month period, which allows time to source the properties, for the Local Authority to consider them, and for the Provider to bring them up to the standards of the contract. Inspections of properties can be done with the Provider and UKVI to enable conversations about the contractual requirements with relevant officers.

Note, the local authority will not receive any specific funding from UKVI in relation to the accepting of adult asylum seekers.

## **8. Conclusion**

It would be difficult for Shropshire Council to engage in both these resettlement schemes. Although an infrastructure has been set up to support the Syrian refugees, this is specifically in relation to support for young people and families. Although the resettlement of the Syrian families has been positively welcomed in Shropshire, this is in part due to the fact they are families with young children who can easily integrate with their neighbours and communities. As the Syrian families arrive with refugee status they are able to access employment as well as mainstream services and benefits, this is not something asylum dispersal allows.

Given the lack of 1 bedroom accommodation and the projected increase in the number of single homeless applicants due to the homeless reduction act there are concerns about how Shropshire would manage an influx of 25 single males (minimum) along with concerns about the leasing of a large building for the accommodation of the cohort of asylum seekers and the impact this could have on a community. However, equally the splitting of the cohort across the County would have a significant impact on the ability to provide relevant support along with the issues of a lack of transport and dedicated support networks that asylum seekers would require.

There is limited OISC-regulated immigration advice available in the county (the Syrian families have had to travel to Wolverhampton) and this would have a significant impact on those going through the asylum system given the in-depth and specialist advice they require. Additionally, any asylum seekers refused asylum would be at risk of their support being terminated and being made destitute which would have wider implications for the Local Authority.

In conclusion, the suggestion is that Shropshire would not be able to appropriately meet the needs of adult asylum seekers and that due to this they would follow friends and family to larger cities where they can engage with the support they require. Learning from decisions made by a number of the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children who have arrived in Shropshire, it is likely that as soon as they are able, the adult asylum seekers will seek out an area that meets their needs better than Shropshire can, thereby causing a constant churn of new individuals who have no links or want to remain in Shropshire.

### 9. Decisions Required

- Should Shropshire commit to the resettlement of a further 10 Syrian families in Shropshire, utilising the established infrastructure and support in place?
- Should Shropshire commit to assist in Asylum dispersal?

<b>List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)</b>
<b>Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)</b> Cllr Lee Chapman
<b>Local Member</b> Covers Shropshire County area
<b>Appendices</b> Dispersal Scheme for Adult Asylum Seekers – <i>Letter from UK Visas &amp; Immigration</i>

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27 November 2017

Dear Clive Wright

**Dispersal Scheme for Adult Asylum Seekers**

I am writing to you in connection with the above scheme. As you will be aware the Asylum and Immigration Act 1999, and its provisions, were implemented with the intention and purpose of ensuring that asylum seekers were dispersed across the UK, in addition to this that no one local authority, area, or region became over-proliferated with those seeking support through the asylum system. The Act makes direct provision for the Secretary of State to provide support for those claiming asylum and to instruct the cooperation and support of local authorities in doing so. Since this time, in the West Midlands seven authorities operate as asylum dispersal areas.

UKVI along with the support of Strategic Migration Partnerships has since 2015 been involved in a programme of work to widen the number of asylum dispersal areas in order to support and ease pressures on existing areas throughout the United Kingdom. We have met with you and all of the other current non-participating local authorities to discuss what this means in practice and provide information about the asylum process and asylum accommodation.

Following these meetings, we are now asking all Local Authorities we have met with for their agreement around the placement of an initial cohort of asylum seekers. UKVI will work closely with you in order in order to support this process.

- Asylum cohort – UKVI are happy to work with you to agree an initial cluster. For context and by way of an example other new dispersal areas have agreed on a cluster of between 25 and 50 asylum seekers. We are happy to be guided by you on this, however, given the services that our Provider must undertake on the maintaining the properties and supporting the occupants I would suggest that 25 be seen as a minimum.
- Location – We will be guided by yourselves on the most practicable areas within your Local Authority. Again, best practice from other areas has usually meant this is best as a central area, with good transport links and services. Where you have taken refugees from the Syrian

Vulnerable Persons Scheme it has also worked well if asylum dispersal follows in those areas given the support and links usually already established.

- Timescale – I can confirm that UKVI are happy for the rollout to take shape at a pace with which you are comfortable. With other new areas this has been over a three to six month period, which allows time to source the properties, for the Local Authority to consider them and for the Provider to bring them up to the standards of the contract.
- In order to provide reassurances around property standards we would encourage and be happy to facilitate the inspection of properties, this can be done with the Provider and UKVI should you wish so we can talk through the contractual requirements with your relevant officers.
- Finally, in terms of future growth in numbers I can confirm that this would not take place without a review meeting with the Local Authority in the first instance, involving the Strategic Migration Partnership, UKVI and our Provider. A review would take place as a minimum at the end of the roll-out of your initial agreed cluster where we would then agree with you next steps for this strand of work.

I hope the above goes some way to reassure you that asylum dispersal can take place with you in control and at a pace and scale with which you feel comfortable. I would be grateful for your response to the above by the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December (please respond to [wmsmp@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:wmsmp@birmingham.gov.uk)). Should you require any further information about the asylum process or asylum accommodation then do not hesitate to contact your Strategic Migration Partnership or myself.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

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