

REPORT TO COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE – 8 NOVEMBER 2018

Aberdeenshire Refugee Resettlement Programme Progress Report

1 Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

1.1 Acknowledge the progress made in relation to Aberdeenshire Council's commitment to Refugee Resettlement.

2 Background / Discussion

2.1 At a meeting of Full Council on 24 September 2015 it was agreed that;

“Aberdeenshire will contribute to the vision of a Scotland where refugees are able to build a new life from the day they arrive and to realise their full potential with the support of mainstream services; where they become active members of our communities, with strong social relationships. That Aberdeenshire welcomes the co-ordination role being taken by COSLA with regard to financial support and integration issues. That the Chief Executive will indicate to the Scottish Government and UK Government, through COSLA, as a matter of priority, the scale of support that Aberdeenshire can offer in the short-term, middle-term, and longer-term, acknowledging that both the Scottish Government and the UK Government have made a commitment to settle refugees within a year.”

A subsequent decision was made to resettle 50 families via the Syrian Vulnerable Persons' Relocation Scheme and 8 families via the Vulnerable Children's Relocation Scheme by 2020.

2.2 The Aberdeenshire Refugee & Asylum Strategy Group (Public Sector) and Aberdeenshire New Scots' Partnership (Public & Third Sector) provide governance and leadership to the ongoing resettlement programme within the wider context of Home Office resettlement outcomes and Scottish Government New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2018 – 2022.

2.3 The Aberdeenshire Refugee Resettlement Team consisting of a Coordinator and four Housing Officers (New Scots), work with the Home Office, United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), COSLA and Aberdeenshire partners to resettle vulnerable families. The UK operates four resettlement schemes: Gateway, Mandate, the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS). Aberdeenshire currently participates in the VPRS and VCRS Schemes. Resettlement schemes offer a safe and legal route to the UK for the most vulnerable refugees. The Home Office target those in greatest need of assistance, including people requiring urgent medical treatment, survivors of violence and torture, and women and children at risk. Aberdeenshire Council works closely with the Home Office and UNHCR, to identify those living in formal

refugee camps, informal settlements and host communities who would benefit most from resettlement to the UK. Refugees are taken directly from non-European countries where resettlement may be the only durable solution, often from the region bordering countries with conflicts. In the case of the VPRS and VCRS, this means those currently in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. This provides refugees with a more direct and safe route to the UK. The Resettlement Programme and associated staffing is funded by the Home Office. Resettlement Team posts are temporary until 31.03.20.

- 2.4 As of September 2018, a total of 39 families (137 people) have been resettled into Aberdeenshire via the Syrian VPRS and VCRS Schemes, with a further 8 babies born into the Scheme in Aberdeen Royal Infirmary. The remaining 19 families will be resettled between October 2018 and March 2020.
- 2.5 The Aberdeenshire Local Housing Strategy 2018-2023 commits that New Scots should have access to good quality affordable housing which meets their needs, culture and lifestyle. Families are accommodated primarily in Private Sector Housing. The Council initially lease properties on behalf of clients and then transition the tenancy after a two year period. Housing is currently sought in Central Aberdeenshire as it provides good connectivity for health, transport, culture, education and employment. Other locations across Aberdeenshire may be considered in the future. Council social housing is currently not utilised for this programme.
- 2.6 Once settled in housing, the Resettlement Team support and enable clients to achieve targets set out in Family Integration Plans. Targets include learning English, seeking employment, developing resilience, travelling independently and participating in community activities.
- 2.7 Syrian and Iraqi clients have been supported to establish Al Amal Project, a community development social enterprise run by and for the new Scots' refugee community. Achievements have included Syrian Coffee Days, cultural exchanges and an Arabic School for children pilot. The innovative work of Al Amal Project has been recognised nationally by Scottish Government and Scottish Refugee and Council and the Chairperson won the Young Scot Community Award in 2017.
- 2.8 The Resettlement Team and partners have identified a key improvement priority in relation to the longer term resettlement and integration of refugee families. Gaining employment and learning English is an integral and essential part of the resettlement process. A new approach to developing and delivering Employability ESOL is required to fuse language learning with job seeking and training. Employability and ESOL partners are being urged to create short and longer term initiatives to address this improvement area.
- 2.9 Relevant ward members have received Resettlement Updates and Elected Members were invited to attend a presentation on the Resettlement Programme in the Members' Lounge at Woodhill House in November 2017. An updated presentation for Elected Members will be delivered in November 2018. Members of the Integration Joint Board will also be invited to attend.
- 2.10 Evaluating and monitoring outcomes and impacts of refugee resettlement is essential to ensure councils are consistent and effective in approach.

Aberdeenshire Council is currently working with the Scottish Government, the Home Office, COSLA and Scottish Refugee Council on a new scheme of UK 'Indicators of Integration' pilot. Once complete, these indicators will be applied across the UK to measure outcomes and impacts of refugee resettlement work.

- 2.11 The current Resettlement Programmes are due to conclude in 2020. In February 2018, the Home Office surveyed all councils in the UK to assess opinion, interest and capacity in relation to longer term refugee resettlement planning. In Scotland, COSLA collated responses from partnership groups indicating that the majority of councils would be in principle, interested in continuing with managed and funded refugee resettlement pending political approval. Several recommendations were made on how future schemes could be operated more effectively and efficiently. A Home Office response to the consultation is expected in the autumn. Any recommendations or future Home Office proposals will be presented to Aberdeenshire Council for consideration.
- 2.12 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and their comments are incorporated within the report and are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.

3 Scheme of Governance

- 3.1 The Committee is able to consider this item in terms of Section D1.1d of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance as it relates to policy issues within the remit of the Committee.

4 Implications and Risk

- 4.1 An equality impact assessment is not required because the recommendations do not have a differential impact on any of the protected characteristics. An equality impact assessment will be carried out as part any future post March 2020 proposals.
- 4.2 There are no staffing or financial implications at this time but this will be revisited once post March 2020 refugee resettlement proposals are confirmed.
- 4.3 The following risk has been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level:
- ACORP002 – Changes in Government policy, legislation and regulation. Any recommendations or future Home Office proposals will be presented to Aberdeenshire Council for consideration.
- 4.4 A town centre first impact assessment is not required because the recommendations do not have a differential impact on town centres.

Ritchie Johnson, Director of Business Services

