
Report To:	Inverclyde Council	Date:	8 October 2015
Report By:	Brian Moore Chief Officer Inverclyde Health and Social Care Partnership	Report No:	SW/26/2015/AH
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Subject:	Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme		

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide information to the Council on a request from the UK Government, via COSLA, for local authorities to provide accommodation and support to the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) scheme.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 The current conflict in Syria has created a humanitarian crisis that has so far resulted in 4.5 million people fleeing the country to seek refuge elsewhere. On 7 September 2015 the Prime Minister announced that the UK would receive 20,000 refugees over the life of the current Parliament, 5 years.
- 2.2 These refugees will be brought to the UK from refugee camps in the middle east. The refugees will be granted immigration status which will allow them to access the full range of welfare benefits, including housing benefit.
- 2.3 Local authorities and their community planning partners will be responsible for providing a range of services to the refugees in their area, including education and health. Refugees will also require support to settle into communities and there will need to be preparation work with communities in order to promote social cohesion.
- 2.4 Inverclyde Council is currently participating in the Afghan Resettlement Scheme with six families successfully relocated to Inverclyde and a further six arriving over the next few months.
- 2.5 A multi-agency partnership has been established which has been instrumental in settling and supporting the Afghan families within Inverclyde.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Council notes the content of this report and give consideration to the request for support from the UK Government.
- 3.2 That the Council indicates its intention to COSLA to participate in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation scheme, and agree to the recommendation from officers that support will be offered to ten families initially.
- 3.3 That the existing multi-agency group chaired by the HSCP, established to deal with the Afghan

Resettlement Programme, be extended to include the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme.

Brian Moore
Chief Officer
Inverclyde Health and Care Partnership

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The current conflict in Syria has created a humanitarian crisis that has so far resulted in 4.5 million people fleeing the country to seek refuge elsewhere, and an estimated further 6.5 million people who have been forced to flee their homes but who still remain within Syria. The majority of the refugees able to leave Syria have been hosted by neighbouring countries, such as Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, but these countries are struggling to cope with the scale of the crisis. This summer has seen thousands of Syrians attempt to enter Europe by land and sea. They have been joined by people from Eritrea, Afghanistan and Algeria, which are also unstable countries that have experienced recent political unrest and conflict. It is estimated that more than 350,000 refugees have arrived in Europe this summer, and an estimated 2,600 people have died on the journey.
- 4.2 The Governments of the UK and other European countries have a legal responsibility under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention to consider the case of any individual who requests protection in their country because of a well-founded fear of persecution in their home country. Under EU law (the Dublin Convention) potential refugees must make their claim for protection in the first European country they come to. This obviously places a great deal of pressure on the countries of the Mediterranean, particularly Spain, Greece, Italy, Malta and Cyprus. There has been increasing pressure on other Governments within the EU to volunteer receive more refugees in order to relieve pressure upon Southern Europe.
- 4.3 Until recently the UK Government's response to the crisis has been focused around the provision of international aid, and to date they have resettled just over 200 refugees through the Home Office's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme. However, on 7 September, the Prime Minister announced that the UK would now receive 20,000 refugees over the life of the current Parliament. These refugees will be brought to the UK from refugee camps in the middle east.
- 4.4 A statement by the First Minister had already indicated that the Scottish Government would support the resettlement of refugees in both financial and practical terms. At a summit held on 4 September 2015 commitment was given to take 1,000 refugees or 10% of the total received by the UK.
- 4.5 Refugees who come to the UK through the resettlement scheme will be identified in camps in countries neighbouring Syria such as Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) will identify people who fit the criteria identified by the UK Government (the criteria is yet to be confirmed, but it is likely to be relaxed from the previous criteria of women and children at risk of violence, medical cases and victims of torture). Refugees will then be subject to security checks and provided with documentation before they leave the camp.
- 4.6 The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) normally accompanies participants of such schemes to the UK where the local authority takes over their care. Due to the scale of the project, it may be necessary to introduce reception centres in the UK where refugees will be accommodated in the first instance before travelling on to the local authority that will host them, but firm decisions have not yet been confirmed.
- 4.7 Based on information from COSLA it is expected that refugees will start arriving within a couple of months. In order to achieve the target of resettling 20,000 people within the life of the Parliament it is expected that around 100 people will need to arrive in the UK each week for the next 4-5 years.
- 4.8 Previously with such schemes there had been a significant time lag between local authorities committing to participate and people arriving into their area. It is expected that this will change for the Syrian scheme and people will arrive quite quickly after a local authority decides to go ahead with the scheme.

5.0 RESOURCES

- 5.1 At present the Home Office provides funding to local authorities accommodating resettled refugees for the first year to cover the cost of providing accommodation and financial support, prior to mainstream benefits coming on stream. Refugees will be granted immigration status which allows them to access mainstream benefits including housing benefit.
- 5.2 Local authorities and their community planning partners will be responsible for providing a range of services to the refugees in their area including education and health. Refugees will also require some support to settle into communities, and there will need to be preparation work with communities in order to promote community cohesion.
- 5.3 Discussions are on-going between the Home Office, Scottish Government and COSLA to secure an enhanced financial package that reflects the fact people resettled from Syria are likely to be particularly vulnerable and may have long-term needs.

6.0 AFGHAN RESETTLEMENT SCHEME

- 6.1 Inverclyde has current experience of a resettlement scheme through the Afghan resettlement programme with six families currently resettled in Inverclyde and a further six to arrive within the next few months.
- 6.2 Experience to date has highlighted an extremely positive partnership approach from a range of Council services and partner agencies which have helped the Afghan nationals to settle well within the local community.

7.0 PROPOSALS

- 7.1 Officers from the Council have been in discussions with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Home Office regarding Inverclyde's potential involvement in the Scheme and these should continue so that we procure the best financial arrangements possible to support this work.
- 7.2 Discussions have also taken place initially with Education Services and local RSL's to determine availability of education placements and housing if Inverclyde agrees to participate in this scheme. These discussions have been positive with all organisations and services spoken to so far keen to support.
- 7.3 The existing multi-agency group which was established to support the Afghan Resettlement Scheme will be urgently reconvened to look at how the Council and its partners best work with the Syrian refugee scheme.
- 7.4 Having successfully been involved in the scheme to resettle Afghan interpreters and their families, officers believe that the infrastructure now in place could be replicated to support Syrian refugees. The financial package, along with the experience and resources gained from the Afghan Scheme, should allow the Council to integrate the families into the local area in a positive way.
- 7.5 Following an initial scoping and discussion internally and externally with partners, it is proposed that with the experience to date, the Council should agree to take ten families over a five year period, initially, into Inverclyde.
- 7.6 It is proposed that Inverclyde would be in a position to support the resettlement of at least two families within the next few weeks.

8.0 CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 Initial thoughts are that the major challenges for the Council being involved in the Syrian scheme

would be financial, language related and cultural.

- 8.2 The Afghan Programme involved settling interpreters and their families. It is unlikely that many of the Syrians will have any English and speak in the main Arabic. This would mean having to access a range of staff, including interpreters, that we do not currently have available locally. Getting trained interpreters to work in Inverclyde has proven difficult at times and there are concerns regarding the increased demand across the UK on skilled interpreters.
- 8.3 There have never been any Syrians, to our knowledge, living in the Inverclyde area and staff would have to be briefed on the cultural issues, including religion, parenting and diet. Any potential community safety issues would also have to be addressed.
- 8.4 Restrictions on Housing Benefit, the Benefit Cap and proposed changes to Child Tax Credits have the potential to adversely affect this group along with some of the other impacts of welfare reform.
- 8.5 To date most services have supported the Afghan scheme from within existing resources however any increase in families will require some capacity issues to be funded. At present these pressures have been identified initially within Education; Health Visiting and an additional support required for the HSCP Refugee Coordinator.

9.0 IMPLICATIONS

Finance

- 9.1 Current discussions indicate that all of the costs of the Scheme will be met by the Home Office and the European Refugee Integration Fund. The Scottish Government have also indicated that they will make funds available to assist however the detail regarding the funding is not yet confirmed.
- 9.2 There is currently funding unallocated from the Afghan Resettlement Scheme that could be utilised more widely to support the Council and its partners to integrate a number and range of refugees within Inverclyde.

Financial Implications:

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report £000	Virement From	Other Comments
N/A					

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact £000	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments
N/A					

Legal

- 9.3 There are no legal implications arising from the Council's participation in this Scheme.

Human Resources

- 9.4 It is envisaged that additional staff within Education and the HSCP may be required however this

has yet to be scoped out in detail. The costs of this will be met through the funding from the Home Office.

Equalities

- 9.5 There are no equalities issues arising from this report however supporting Inverclyde to become a more ethnically diverse community is viewed as a positive.

	YES (see attached appendix)
√	NO - This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy. Therefore, no Equality Impact Assessment is required.

Repopulation

- 9.6 The Council will advise COSLA that Inverclyde would prefer to only receive families rather than single adults as families are more likely to stay and integrate within the wider community. This should assist in the repopulation of the area in much the same way our involvement in the Afghan Relocation Scheme has.

10.0 CONSULTATIONS

- 10.1 There has been some limited consultation with community planning partners however a positive response has been forthcoming.
- 10.2 Housing associations locally have been consulted around their ability to provide appropriate accommodation if Inverclyde participates in this scheme. Both River Clyde Homes and Oaktree have advised that subject to appropriate housing being available within their vacant stock, they will be keen to support the Council.
- 10.3 Due to the on-going pressures on school places, Education have been consulted about the availability of school places and have provided details of where they have capacity, particularly in primary schools. Every effort will be made to try and obtain suitable housing near available school placements to prevent children having to be transported across Inverclyde. These discussions will continue once we are able to determine the demographics of arriving families.

11.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 11.1 Having been successfully involved in the scheme to resettle Afghan interpreters and their families, officers firmly believe that the infrastructure is now in place to allow the Council to similarly support Syrian refugees.