



CABINET – 9TH SEPTEMBER 2020

SUBJECT: UK RESETTLEMENT SCHEME (UKRS)

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR – EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update on the authority's participation in the UK's **Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme** (VPRS) and its contribution to alleviating the humanitarian crisis affecting millions displaced within Syria and the surrounding countries of Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and Egypt.
- 1.2 This report also provides an overview of how the resettlement programme is being reformed (post 2020) and requests a steer from Corporate Management Team on future participation in the successor resettlement programme, the **UK Resettlement Scheme** (UKRS), and/or the UK's **Asylum Seeker Dispersal Scheme** (ASDS).

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 In 2015 Caerphilly CBC became one of the first authorities in the UK to support the VPRS; during the past 4 years the authority has successfully resettled 7 families, comprising 35 refugees. The VPRS was a five-year commitment that is now entering its final stages - refugees are supported for 5 years after settlement taking the maximum time period of the VPRS to 10 years. The UK government has announced plans to continue its support for refugees under a new UK Resettlement Scheme set to start in 2020. The new scheme plans to resettle in the region of 5,000 of the world's most vulnerable refugees in its first year.
- 2.2 This report seeks clarification on the role of the authority in the future resettlement programme as well as recognising alternative approaches, such as the Asylum Seeker Dispersal Scheme, should the authority wish to continue to support the UK Governments efforts in meeting their international obligations to provide humanitarian protection to those most in need.
- 2.3 The WLGA, through the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership, have recently written to the Leader and Chief Executive asking for the level of commitment CCBC is able to give to the UKRS.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That Cabinet consider which of the following three Options they would wish to take:

Option 1: Participation in resettlement programmes draws to a conclusion at the end of the current scheme with continued support for families up to the maximum period.

Option 2: CCBC participates in the successor UKRS. There are challenges in terms of

housing availability, Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and general welfare provision, set out in the report.

Option 3: In addition to, or in place of, the new UKRS, CCBC establishes a dialogue with the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership to discuss the ASDS. A further report would be required once the implications of becoming an asylum dispersal area were assessed.

Option 2 is the officer recommended option. Further discussion would be required on participation in the ASDS.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 To provide options for the authority to consider regarding its future participation in the resettlement of refugees and/or asylum seekers.

Given the funding allocated to the UK Resettlement Scheme and CCBC's already established processes in delivering refugee resettlement, it is recommended that the local authority considers following Option 2. This option allows the LA to resettle future cases at a rate and volume that is discretionary to the authority and partners.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 In 2015 the UK Government expanded their existing Syrian resettlement programme and made a commitment to resettle up to 20,000 Syrian refugees over the course of five years. Local authorities and community partners were encouraged to support the national programme, which at that stage had also gained universal backing from the devolved governments
- 5.2 In late 2015 Corporate Management Team and Cabinet approved the authority's participation in the resettlement programme outlining a degree of commitment proportionate to the local capacity of services, for Caerphilly CBC this was an undertaking to try to support three families a year. Since that time all authorities in Wales have received families under the scheme and have outlined a continued commitment going forward. Up until end June 2019 the UK has welcomed over 18,000 refugees (including children) from across the region, this equates to 1,237 refugees relocated into Wales

In July 2017, the decision was taken to further expand the scope of the scheme to include not only Syrian nationals but other refugees fleeing surrounding countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. CCBC did not extend to MENA support at this time.

All families in this area are supported by a team of case workers that also assist refugee families in the neighbouring authorities of Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent.

5.3 How are refugee families assessed for relocation in the UK?

The UK Government works closely with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to identify those most in need of support; women and children at risk, people in severe need of medical care and survivors of torture and violence.

Once eligibility is confirmed the Home Office work with participating local authorities and/or community sponsorship groups to allocate the case for UK resettlement. On arrival Biometric Residence Permits are issued with 5 years' Refugee Leave status. Refugee status is a form of protection that may be granted to people who meet the definition of refugee and who are of special humanitarian concern – this enables those with refugees status to access full work and benefit entitlement and freedom of movement in the UK, in addition refugees can expect to receive the same access to education and health care provision as any other British resident.

5.4 **What funding arrangements are in place?**

The first 12 months of a refugee's resettlement costs are funded by central government using the overseas aid budget (£8,500 per person plus education costs for school aged children – based on the ages of the child on arrival). The UK Government has also provided an additional £10m funding for ESOL classes (English for Speakers of Other Languages) to enhance the English language skills of adults to improve their resettlement and integration experience and employability, this equates to a one off payment to the host authority of £850 per adult over 19 years of age.

For years 2-5 of the programme funding is tapered from £5,000 per person in their second year, to £1,000 per person in year five. There is also an exceptional cases fund to assist the most vulnerable refugees. This is allocated on a case by case basis and is applied for by the host authority, this enables local authorities to support those more complex and vulnerable people as they rebuild their lives in the UK.

5.5 **Caerphilly's partnership approach to delivering the programme**

Prior to the arrival of a case due regard is given to the capacity of all services, as such a partnership approach has been embedded from the early stages of delivering the programme this includes;

- accommodation sourced through a dedicated housing association
- liaising with police colleagues to determine the appropriateness of an identified property and the surrounding area (recognising community cohesion complexities that may cause conflict)
- liaising with Health Board colleagues to ensure the health board has the capacity to support complex medical needs
- liaising with the LEA to check what schools/Early Years provision have availability and which year groups could support new arrivals.

5.6 **How has the Caerphilly supported refugees post arrival?**

The Home Office grant has been used to commission Displaced People in Action (DPIA), a specialist third sector provider, across the three West Gwent authorities. DPIA work with each family, supporting them to orientate to their new communities; each family has an assigned case worker. To establish a strong sense of belonging case workers promote the value in learning English language and scope befriending and volunteering opportunities. Additionally, DPIA in collaboration with partners and community groups (such as community connector services, Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales), continue to explore volunteering and work-based opportunities relevant to the interests of the individual. This approach has enabled new arrivals to learn skills that are relevant to the local job market in their resettled areas.

The funding has also provided opportunities for collaboration across West Gwent to provide provision that may otherwise be under resourced such as additional ESOL classes. The experiences gained in delivering this programme has emphasised the importance of new arrivals learning English as quickly as possible, Caerphilly CBC are providing 4 hours of home tuition to each family relocated within the borough - this compliments the existing community based ESOL services which are also available but removes barriers often experienced by women refugees, such as access to child care.

Community engagement activities have supported the integration of new arrivals has allowed events for refugees to meet and engage with each other and the wider community. For example, refugees have attended various community led activities such as Christmas parties, summer festivals, trips to places of interests (Caerphilly Castle, Big Pit), attending play groups, employment fairs etc. all of which has supported a strong sense of belonging to the area - all of the above has been fully funded by the Home Office grant.

5.7 **Benefits, challenges and complexities to delivering the programme**

The Home Office funding is a key strength to the Resettlement Programme. This funding avoids any local conflicts or community tensions based on financial concerns and, given the

current challenging economic circumstances of local authorities, without this support there may have been additional barriers in the initial or ongoing engagement in the programme across Wales. Based on the current number of refugees relocated into Caerphilly the authority will receive £718,200 over the five-year period, not including education or child care top up grants.

The funding structure also allows the flexibility for authorities to respond and develop services and integration approaches quickly and in accordance with individual need. For instance in West Gwent funding has supported free access to community services, such as access to public transport over the initial 12 months, which has supported integration and wellbeing. The funding has also provided opportunities for collaboration with other authorities to deliver provision that may be otherwise be under resourced.

Whilst there are benefits to Caerphilly CBC participating in the resettlement programme there are also significant challenges.

Many refugees arrive with health care needs due to pre-existing chronic conditions and injuries suffered during conflict and torture, furthermore the psychological impact of the conflict cannot be underestimated amongst refugees, the extent to which may only present itself post resettlement, in some cases more than a year after arrival. From the experiences of authorities across West Gwent in resettling families, the degree of mental health complexities varies considerably. Whilst the psychological trauma of children has been a common presentation in several cases (although not in all), adult mental health (influenced by previous experiences of torture, sexual violence and bereavement) have provided new challenges, confounded by lengthy waiting lists and in some areas a lack or limited mental health care services. As mental health often influences the community integration of a case and the overall wellbeing of the family this has led to increased draw on case worker support and sometimes the need for local services to step in at short notice.

Whilst the availability of school places has not limited the overall number of resettlements into the region this does need to be considered should Caerphilly CBC decide to continue participating in the resettlement programme. Schools receiving pupils under this programme have encountered challenges, but these have been overcome with support from the case workers, LEA and GEMS (Gwent Education Minority Ethnic Service) although this has been a draw on school resources. The support for Additional Language Needs (ALN) in schools needs to be acknowledged as a concern, increasingly schools who are supporting refugees have recognised ALN provision as essential, particularly in the case of older children entering the exam system, but due to recent changes in resource availability this support will be difficult to access in the future.

Housing remains the biggest challenge to welcoming new arrivals and is an issue that has largely influenced the rate and volume of resettled cases into the West Gwent region, recognising this as a factor is essential in order to develop a sustainable approach to the resettlement programme going forward. The lack of affordable private rented housing in some areas which will favour refugee resettlement, namely communities that are well connected, that have lower crime/Anti-Social Behaviours rates etc., is particularly acute. Furthermore, the benefit cap has limited the amount of Housing Benefit Allowance that families receive which can result in a rent shortfall which then needs to be absorbed by the family.

5.8 **Ongoing delivery of the current programme**

Caerphilly CBC has successfully resettled 7 families into the borough; the support of those families will remain ongoing for 5 years after arrival. Local families are increasingly demonstrating independence and case worker support is now being tapered off in line with an increased level of resilience. The lead officer role for ongoing management has recently been handed to the Regional Community Cohesion Coordinator, who manages this programme across the West Gwent area. The Coordinator will manage the delivery of DPIA and ESOL contracts holding monthly meetings with the case workers to discuss the progress of each family, this includes evaluating the progress of all resettlement action plans to ensure there

are consistent approaches adopted for each resettled family and that the support is tapered at the appropriate juncture to ensure independence. If any areas of underperformance are highlighted, then appropriate measures are taken and will be monitored.

5.9 Future UK Resettlement Scheme

Whilst the current resettlement programme remains voluntary, in the wake of continued and often cross cutting conflicts in the MENA region, requests for further assistance are being made to local authorities across the UK to continue to support the UK Governments effort.

The current Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) will conclude in 2020, and in light of this the Home Secretary recently announced that the UK will continue to resettle thousands of refugees under a new scheme set to start once the current scheme concludes next year. This new scheme, the UK Resettlement Scheme, will resettle in the region of 5,000 of the world's most vulnerable refugees in its first year and will be delivered and funded in the same way as the current VPRS.

The new scheme will aim to resettle refugees at current levels, adding to the nearly 16,000 refugees who have already found safety here since 2015. From 2020, the new resettlement scheme will consolidate the Vulnerable Persons' Resettlement Scheme, the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme and the Gateway Protection Programme (the latter two programmes run in parallel to the VPRP and are not currently being delivered in Caerphilly) into one global scheme.

The new programme will be simpler to operate and provide greater consistency in the way that the UK government resettles refugees. It will broaden the geographical focus beyond the Middle East and North Africa. New processes for emergency resettlement will also be developed, allowing the UK to respond quickly to instances when there is a heightened need for protection, providing a faster route to resettlement where lives are at risk.

5.10 Asylum Seeker Dispersal

As an aside to the UK's Refugee Resettlement Programmes the Home Office continues to seek the cooperation of local authorities to ensure that the UK is able to discharge its obligations with regard to the accommodation of those claiming asylum, an asylum seeker is a person who has sought protection as a refugee, but whose claim for refugee status has not yet been assessed.

Whilst recognising the pressures that local authorities are faced with across the UK, the country has a statutory duty to provide support and assistance to those who are most in need. 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 over reliance on any one area.

Four local authorities in Wales (Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham) have supported asylum dispersal since its introduction in 2000, engaging with the Home Office and its providers to find appropriate accommodation solutions. In consultation with housing providers, the Home Office have recently concluded that the current geography of asylum dispersal needs to be widened.

On 15 March 2016 the Director General of United Kingdom Visas and Immigration (UKVI) wrote to the Chief Executive of all Local Authorities throughout the UK to request their cooperation to ensure that the United Kingdom is able to discharge its obligations regarding the accommodation of people seeking asylum in the UK and that request remains open to any local authority.

Asylum seeker dispersal offers some benefits but also complexities to participating local authorities. For example, once a suitable property has been identified the support and management of cases is the sole responsibility of the Home Office, in Wales this is managed by a company called Clear Springs Management. However, with the ongoing Brexit

complexities community cohesion needs to be considered should the authority deem it appropriate to participate as an asylum dispersal area.

5.11 **WLGA request for decision on continued commitment.**

On the 13th of November the WLGA, through the Spokesperson for Equalities, Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty, wrote to local authorities asking for their view on participation in the new UK Resettlement Scheme, posing three questions:

- Would you be able provide an indication in the coming weeks as to whether your authority will participate in the UK Resettlement Scheme?
- How many refugees do you envisage being able to resettle in the coming financial year (2020/21)?
- Do you envisage that you will participate in resettlement following the first year of the Global Resettlement Scheme? (Post 2020/21)

5.12 **Conclusion**

Caerphilly CBC has successfully resettled 7 families under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme which was expanded in 2015. Local families are resettled in communities and schools and are integrating well. However, in the wake of continued and often cross cutting conflicts in the MENA region, requests for further assistance are being made to local authorities across the UK.

This report requests a decision to either continue through the new scheme, or to draw a conclusion to Caerphilly CBC's participation. Recognising pressures in housing and education provision.

Further that the Asylum Dispersal Scheme has made previous requests to local authorities to consider participation as an asylum dispersal area. This would need to be explored with a further report to CMT on the full implications.

6. **ASSUMPTIONS**

- 6.1 Whilst the availability of school places has not limited the overall number of resettlements into the region the support for Additional Language Needs (ALN) in schools need to be taken into consideration to Caerphilly's future engagement of the programme.

Housing remains the biggest challenge and is an issue that has largely influenced the rate and volume of resettled cases into the West Gwent region, recognising this as a factor is essential in order to develop a sustainable approach to the resettlement programme. It is also important to consider the implications on housing and how participating in the future resettlement programme may compete with other housing priorities such as homelessness.

7. **LINKS TO RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES**

7.1 **Corporate Plan 2018-2023.**

The following well-being objectives have a bearing the resettlement of families under the Home Office schemes. While resettled families are not residents until they come to live in the area their support needs are met through service delivery relevant to:

- WBO 1 - Improve education opportunities for all
- WBO 2 - Enabling employment
- WBO 3 - Address the supply, condition and sustainability of homes throughout the county borough and provide advice, assistance or support to help improve people's health and well-being

8. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

- 8.1 The participation of Caerphilly CBC in the local resettlement of refugees evidences the authority's commitment to the Well-being of Future Generations legislation. Furthermore, the delivery of the programme has been aligned with the Well-being and Corporate Plans to ensure Caerphilly develops services and integration approaches that support community cohesion and equality of opportunity. Resettlement contributes to the following well-being goals:

A Prosperous Wales

Supporting resettlement actively contributes to develop a more prosperous Wales. Supporting vulnerable people fleeing conflict and providing a safe haven for them to live, grow, learn and contribute to wider society will benefit the local area.

A More Equal Wales

Supporting resettlement will support a more equal Wales. Work with individuals and families to ensure they have access to the services they require to live, grow, learn and be healthy as well as integrate within the community

A Wales of Cohesive Communities

The Council works with its partners to ensure the right placement and services are in place for successful integration supporting stable and cohesive communities. This has already been demonstrated in the delivery of 7 cases. Diversity is a supporting element of cohesive communities.

A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language

The local authority works alongside partners to ensure that appropriate support is in place to enable refugees gain access to a wide range of opportunities including English language learning and the appropriate opportunities for individuals who wish to learn the Welsh language. We also promote opportunities for community activities, play, arts and sport and a guide to Caerphilly

A Globally Responsible Wales

The local authority in supporting resettlement will be actively contributing to a globally responsible Wales enacting upon an humanitarian duty to support vulnerable children and refugees.

The Sustainable Development Principle, otherwise known as the 5 ways of working is considered below:

Long Term - The report recognises the long term implications of continued participation in the resettlement programme, highlighting key impacts on services such as ALN school support and mental health provision. It is also important to consider the implications on housing and how participating in the future resettlement programme may compete with the wider homelessness policies which the local authorities are currently prioritising.

However, the continued participation of Caerphilly CBC in said relocation schemes provides families who have experienced considerable hardship with a long-term safe haven, furthermore, the support which is delivered (and fully funded by the Home Office) to families has enabled refugees rebuild their lives and to resettle into the local community.

Prevention – Should Caerphilly CBC continue to support the resettlement programme we would be working to help prevent vulnerable children and their families from further trauma and suffering in areas of significant conflict and, further, discharging both our moral and humanitarian obligations.

Integration - Supporting these schemes is an extension to existing commitments across the well-being objectives to support vulnerable people, we work with a range of services to ensure partners contribute to a successful resettlement.

Collaboration – Should the local authority consider supporting future participation, we will continue to delivery the scheme in collaboration with wider partners including; ABuHB, Gwent Police, Housing providers, Voluntary Sector and the LEA ensuring the continued successful resettlement of refugees into the borough.

Involvement - In supporting the scheme the local authority has involved the community in the practical resettlement process, we will continue to provide this approach.

9. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Children and older adults targeted in the Middle East because of their inherent vulnerability have been identified by the UNHCR for resettlement under the VPRP. We recognise the complexities in supporting younger children who have previously experienced trauma. The knowledge we have gained, and the support currently being provided to existing families will be utilised to support future resettlements, but there are implications and a continued draw on services should the authority continue to engage in the programme. For example, there is potential for future cases to include health care needs due to pre-existing conditions and/or injuries suffered during conflict - to mitigate the draw on services we will be fully engaged with partners in the lead up to and post future resettlements, ensuring that all support is tailored and appropriate to the level of need. This includes liaising with the local health board and housing provider to ensure that future properties are suitable for the level of need.

Woman and girls at risk of forced marriage or other forms of exploitation are included in the criteria for resettlement under the current programme. In recognising the existing barriers that are often encountered by woman and girls in engaging in community life and education, we work closely with the DPIA team of case workers to explore ways which are culturally sensitive to nurturing female independence and building lifelong resilience

Refugees targeted based on their religion and/or ethnic backgrounds are recognised by the UNHCR as a qualifying criteria for the UK's resettlement programme. Should the authority wish to continue to participate in the programme we will work with families to ensure that their cultural and/or religious background is positively reflected in the resettlement plans put in place for each family. This has previously included signposting families to multi-faith communities, reputable mosques and churches, all of which support the community orientation process post relocation.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Home Office provide funding for the host local authorities throughout the 5 year period this includes; adults £8,520, children 5-18 years £13,020, children 3-4 years £10,770 and children under 3 years £8,520. Outside of this support funding, resettled refugees are eligible for welfare benefit support. There is no direct call on local authority budgets other than the officer time to support the Regional Community Cohesion Coordinator and respond to intervention requests at initial settlement and to resolve any difficulties in accessing education support, employment support and health services.

11. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 None

12. CONSULTATIONS

- 12.1 The Chief Housing Officer has commented that there are pressures in the system with a significant housing waiting list. The private rented sector is the best option for refugees and while there has been some success in gaining properties through the dedicated housing association, increasing demand will make this more difficult. As landlords set their own levels of rent these may become unaffordable for refugees.

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