



CABINET – 7TH SEPTEMBER 2022

SUBJECT: REVIEW OF ASYLUM DISPERSAL, AFGHAN RELOCATION AND UKRAINIAN SCHEMES

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR SOCIAL SERVICES AND HOUSING

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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To present a 12-month review of the asylum dispersal process as agreed by Cabinet in July 21 and to consider and agree the findings of the review.
- 1.2 To update on the Afghan resettlement scheme.
- 1.3 To update on the Ukraine resettlement scheme.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to present a review of the operation of the asylum dispersal process in the county borough over the last 12 months and to reflect on other resettlement schemes in the context of the combined requirements to support refugees and displaced people across several schemes.
- 2.2 There is a new emerging UK Government Policy of 'assumed dispersal' to consider and explain the impact on the future landscape of asylum dispersal across Wales.
- 2.3 The reports provide further information on the response to the evacuation of civilians from Kabul over the latter summer of 2021 and how the Council has supported families to settle in the area.
- 2.4 The humanitarian crisis in Ukraine has displaced millions of people from the country who are arriving in the UK under several associated visa routes. The report updates on the support offered to Ukraine nationals and their arrival in the county borough.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To agree the review findings contained within the paper after 12 months of asylum dispersal in Caerphilly as an approved Asylum Dispersal Area.
- 3.2 That Cabinet note the changes in the resettlement landscape since the report on the 7th of July 2021. Notably the new policy of assumed dispersal and the extension of resettlement support to arrivals from Afghanistan

- 3.3 To note the continued humanitarian situation in the Ukraine and the increase in arrivals to Wales and Caerphilly. Recognising how the Ukraine nationals are being housed and the existing and proposed future support.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The latest UK wide policy on Asylum Dispersal is 'assumed' and therefore working in partnership with UK Gov and the Home Office we will be able to demonstrate we have appropriately contributed as an asylum dispersal area when reviewing future distribution.
- 4.2 Acknowledging and understanding the severity of the situation with the arrival of Ukrainian nationals and the lack of accommodation, allows officers to further multiple opportunities as swiftly as possible.

5. THE REPORT

Asylum Dispersal

- 5.1 On the 7th of July 2021 Cabinet agreed that the Council would become an asylum dispersal area. Working with the Home Office and through the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership to support the combined effort to accommodate asylum seeking individuals.
- 5.2 The decision was to work with the Home Office provider, Clearsprings Ready Homes (Clearsprings), to bring 5 family properties online and review after a period of 12 months.
- 5.3 Ward members are not notified of the arrival addresses of refugees and displaced people in their constituency. The reason being to allow people to settle in the area as any other family or individual would and not to single them out or draw attention to their arrival in the country or the county borough. However, recognising that the asylum dispersal system is a different situation the address of selected properties will be made known to ward members and early engagement undertaken with Clearsprings Ready Homes.
- 5.4 A member's seminar took place on the 28th of June 21 to support the proposed decision to move ahead with becoming an asylum dispersal area and provide a background awareness for all members.
- 5.5 Since that time 2 family properties have been operational in the county borough. Clearsprings Ready Homes, the Home Office provider, procure properties in the private rented sector. This is a challenging environment in which to secure affordable housing given the tight rental market and is the reason why only 2 family properties are currently occupied.
- 5.6 Both properties have been operating very effectively with two asylum seeking families supported by Clearsprings while their asylum claims are heard. They are provided with housing and support to meet their essential needs. Clearsprings maintain and support the programme along with Migrant Help and there has been no issues.
- 5.7 One family has now moved on to more sustainable accommodation and the property will be recirculated to the next family. The families and children have had a positive experience of residing in the county borough and the partnership with Clearsprings has been beneficial and effective.
- 5.8 Any new properties that are proposed by Clearsprings, will always be considered and reviewed by, community safety, police, health, education and housing.

- 5.9 The support and services of Clearsprings, Migrant Help, Welsh Strategic Migration Partnership and the Team Caerphilly approach across all services, linking with Gwent police, has meant that the two families have integrated well with no issues. The outcome of the review is that it has been a success with no community cohesion issues.

Assumed Dispersal

- 5.10 UK Government policy has moved significantly since last year and in April this year a new policy of 'assumed dispersal' was announced across all local authorities in England and Wales. In effect, a Council area need not have agreed to become a dispersal area through a decision. What this means is that all local authorities will potentially be receiving asylum seekers into accommodation in their areas. This policy is set against a backdrop of continuing high numbers of arrivals into the UK and the inability of the historic areas to absorb the additional arrivals. In developing assumed dispersal, the Home Office have asked all Strategic Migration Partnerships across the UK to develop plans to accommodate additional numbers. In terms of the 'ask' across all 22 local authorities in Wales this equates to approximately 2400 additional places by the end of 2023.
- 5.11 Clearsprings Ready Homes would prefer to continue to work in partnership with local authorities in discussing the procurement of suitable accommodation. Part of this work involves a consideration of local policing issues, availability and capacity of health care and the provision of local school places. Council officers meet with Clearsprings on a regular basis and dialogue has been open, honest and mutually supportive.
- 5.12 The asylum dispersal landscape in a central government policy context is now significantly different to when the last report was presented for Cabinet decision. Council officers will continue to work in partnership with Clearsprings Ready Homes alongside health and policing partners. Where properties are identified for procurement local ward elected members will be engaged on the process to enable them to understand the wraparound support and case management that Clearsprings provide.

Afghan Resettlement

- 5.13 Subsequent to last year's Cabinet report the situation in Afghanistan escalated externally quickly with the evacuation of civilians who had helped the military forces airlifted from Kabul. This was in addition to the cohort of Afghan translators who had already been assisted to leave the country as US and international forces withdrew. The immediate emergency evacuation was a direct consequence of the Taliban takeover and the potential for reprisals against those Afghans, and their families, who had assisted the international forces.
- 5.14 The Cabinet report anticipated the likely involvement of the Council in helping with this humanitarian effort. To update on the situation over the past 12 months, 2 families have been settled in the county borough and have been supported to integrate, with the children attending local schools, and with the help of our commissioned specialist provider, Displaced People in Action. Sadly, a number of families remain in hotel accommodation over 12 months later. We are constantly seeking affordable rental properties with one more having come on stream over the past few weeks.
- 5.15 The resettlement of Afghan families operates in the same way as the resettlement of families from Syria and other areas of the world facing humanitarian crises that the Council has been an active participant in since 2015.

Ukraine Resettlement

- 5.16 The Ukraine crisis began during March of this year. UK Government offered several visa routes to arrivals; an extension of the visas of people already living here, the Ukraine Family Scheme whereby extended family members could apply for a 3-year visa to live and work in the UK, and the Homes for Ukraine Scheme where local families offer up a space in their homes, or self-contained accommodation to arrivals from Ukraine.
- 5.17 In addition, as a nation of sanctuary the Welsh Government agreed a super-sponsor route, where arrivals could apply for visas with the support and sponsorship of Welsh Government.
- 5.18 In terms of arrivals into the county borough many local families/individuals have offered up a room or property to Ukrainian individuals or families. At the time of writing there were currently 73 arrivals living with hosts predominantly via the Homes for Ukraine scheme and some starting to be accommodated via the Welsh Government Super Sponsor route. Families are integrating well, and a dedicated Ukraine Arrival Liaison post has been created with a Ukraine national supporting the Council's resettlement officers in welcoming the cohort. Several social events to assist with integration and support for hosts have taken place.
- 5.19 The Welsh Government super-sponsor route presents a more challenging situation as more visas have been issued than were planned. Arrivals via the super-sponsor route are initially hosted in a network of Welcome Centres or hotels while longer term accommodation is sought. Modelling has been provided by Welsh Government based on population and arrivals to date, to calculate how many Ukrainian nationals Caerphilly will be asked to accommodate from the Welcome Centres, hotels and potentially direct from the arrival hubs. This represents a significant increase on the numbers of arrivals we have seen to date and will likely need swift decisions across the council to ensure we can accommodate Caerphilly's national share.
- 5.20 Ukrainian's have been given status like other domestic households for allocation via the common allocation policy and via the common housing register. The allocation policy is being amended to reflect this change by Welsh Government. We await further guidance on how housing and accommodation is accessed by the Ukrainian nationals during this humanitarian crisis.

Conclusion

- 5.21 The new UK wide Asylum Dispersal policy will impact all authorities across Wales, and it is the responsibility of Caerphilly along with peer authorities, as Wales is a nation of sanctuary, to support all those experiencing humanitarian suffering and having to leave their home nations.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

- 6.1 There are no assumptions made in this report.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 This report provides an update on the current landscape for displaced people and refugees. The drivers are external to the Council and so this report does not relate to any issues that the Council is leading on. An impact assessment is not considered relevant to this situation

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 For asylum dispersal UK Government have provide a £250 good will payment for arrivals in the county borough during the past financial year. Going forward the amount will increase to £3500 for any new spaces in any given year.
- 8.2 For Afghan resettlement the tariff funding on over tapers over three years after arrival with the initial tariff set at £10,500 with and associated tapering amount for education support for children depending on school age.
- 8.3 For Ukraine resettlement a £350 monthly thank-you payment is made available to hosts for up to 12 months after arrival, this is paid through UK Government. The tariff amount associated with arrivals mirrors that for Afghans but its only available for 12-months.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Due to the increased workload, as set out above, the Ukraine tariff funding due through Welsh Government from UK Government has been used to create a temporary 12-month Resettlement Team to add to the single post that did exist in the Service Improvement and Partnerships Unit (Corporate Policy). This team comprises a team leader, two policy officers, five resettlement support officers and the Ukraine Arrival Liaison.
- 9.2 Colleagues across the Council and among partners are currently meeting frequently to take a multi-disciplinary approach to case work and planning. This involves Housing, Social Services, Education, Employment Support, Information Governance, Communications, and Data Control capacities internally. Police and Health colleagues also attend.
- 9.3 There are several weekly strategic meetings running to support the Ukraine humanitarian crisis with both Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association.

10. CONSULTATIONS

- 10.1 There are no consultation responses that have not been reflected in this report

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