

Report to the Cabinet

Meeting to be held on Thursday, 11 June 2020

Report of the Head of Service - Policy Information and Commissioning (Start Well)

Part I

Electoral Division affected:
(All Divisions);

United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme (Appendix 'A' refers)

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Executive Summary

The Government announced, in the summer of 2019, a new refugee resettlement programme, the United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme. This scheme will resettle refugees from many different nationalities and will consolidate a number of existing programmes. Local authorities have been invited to submit pledges to resettle refugees under the new scheme and many district councils in Lancashire and Blackpool Council have already committed to participate. The scheme is fully funded by central Government, with no financial implications to local authorities. Lancashire County Council is already working with other local authorities in Lancashire to deliver the Syrian Resettlement Programme and the Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme, through which over 600 refugees have been resettled in Lancashire in the past four years.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to approve that:

- (i) The county council continues in its role of lead authority, and coordinates the delivery of the United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme in Lancashire.
- (ii) The county council continues to work with the Home Office and regional partners in order to seek additional pledges from local authorities, so Lancashire can resettle a proportionate number of refugees within the Government's overall commitment to refugee resettlement.
- (iii) The county council continues to commission projects and services, using central Government funding, that aim to develop a sustainable infrastructure for refugee integration into our communities.

Background and Advice

In 2015, the Government announced the biggest increase in refugee resettlement in recent times, pledging to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020. In the following year, Local Authorities in Lancashire came together and pledged to resettle 575 refugees during that period, with Lancashire County Council acting as the lead authority and coordinating delivery across Lancashire. Less than four years since that pledge, the Lancashire Refugee Resettlement Programme has resettled in excess of 600 refugees, most of them Syrians.

The current resettlement schemes delivered in Lancashire are fully funded by central Government, with the county council (on behalf of all participating local authorities) receiving in excess of £20,000 per resettled refugee over five years to help it settle and integrate the new refugee communities in Lancashire. This external funding has allowed local authorities in Lancashire to commission dozens of third sector organisations to help deliver integration services and projects.

The county council coordinates the delivery of the resettlement programme in Lancashire. The council coordinates allocations and arrivals, and provides strategic direction, advice and guidance to various stakeholders and, in the past 18 months, have been commissioning a range of services and projects to help refugees integrate and make valuable contributions to communities across Lancashire. The council now employs a small team, fully funded by central Government, to commission specialist integration services, particularly in the areas of community integration, employment, business development, health and wellbeing, refugee support, and interpreting and translation.

This work aims to build a sustainable infrastructure for refugee support and refugee integration in our communities. It includes a refugee mental health service, centred on refugee trauma, a refugee health and social care advocacy service, specialist employment advisers working with Job Centres, an enterprise network, and projects that aim to foster cultural exchange and the building of bridges between refugee and established communities. To help commission this work, the county council has established a number of grant schemes, funded by the resettlement programme. These grant schemes are enabling an increasing number of third sector organisations in Lancashire to access funding to develop integration work with refugees and local communities.

A significant part of the county council's work is devoted to partnership building, training and raising awareness of the needs and assets of refugees and refugee communities. Our developing work with health providers, Job Centres, employers, education providers, and voluntary and community groups is helping shape a welcoming environment for refugees in Lancashire. The support services that we commission for refugees are opening up opportunities for positive contributions by these new groups to our communities and economy.

The county council is also taking a leading role in advising and supporting faith and voluntary organisations who are setting up community sponsorship schemes for refugees in Lancashire. Four such schemes are already in operation, with several

more in the pipeline. Community sponsorships are seen by Government as a key tool for refugee resettlement in the coming years.

The county council's leading role in refugee resettlement in Lancashire also allows us to take a strategic role in asylum seekers dispersal in our sub-region. At present, nearly 1,000 asylum seekers are dispersed in the county council area, with all districts participating in the scheme. The integration services commissioned by the county council, and funded through the resettlement programme, are increasingly aimed at benefiting the wider refugee and asylum seeker population in Lancashire, currently estimated at over 2,000.

District councils and unitary authorities in Lancashire support the Refugee Resettlement Programme mainly by providing pledges, sourcing houses for the refugee families, and commissioning some local services. From 2020, the county council will be supporting some of the other local authorities with sourcing the required housing. However the responsibility of ensuring that properties meet local authority standards will remain with district councils and unitary authorities.

In June 2019, the Government announced a new resettlement programme, the *United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme*, to replace and consolidate all of the resettlement schemes currently operating in the United Kingdom (the largest being the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme - also known as the Syrian Resettlement Programme, and the Gateway Protection Programme). The new scheme will involve the resettlement of refugees from a diverse range of nationalities, although it is expected that, in the first stages, most refugees resettled under it will be Syrians.

In August 2019 the Home Office issued a note to local authorities (Appendix 'A') detailing the operational features of the new scheme, including a commitment to resettle 5,000 refugees nationally, which is equivalent to the overall number of refugees currently being resettled under various existing schemes. The note also confirmed that the funding for the new scheme will be in line with the current funding for the Syrian Resettlement Programme (also known as the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme). This means that all services commissioned and delivered under the new scheme will have no financial implication for the county council or our local authority partners.

On 20 December 2019, the Director of Resettlement, Asylum Support and Integration in the Home Office wrote to local authorities to request pledges to resettle refugees under the new scheme. Most local authorities in Lancashire have already made pledges, with more likely to follow. There are currently 12 (out of 14) local authorities in Lancashire, resettling refugees in the county and it is likely that most of those 12 local authorities will continue to play a role in refugee resettlement in the future.

In the summer of 2019, the county council conducted a review of the current arrangements of the Lancashire Refugee Resettlement Programme, and all local authorities expressed support for the role of the county council as the lead authority, and also to the commissioning and refugee integration work carried out by the county council refugee integration team, which is fully funded by Home Office grants.

This paper's recommendations, if approved, will consolidate the role of the county council as the lead strategic and operational player in refugee resettlement in our sub-region. The work of the county council is increasingly acknowledged locally, regionally and nationally, with some of our strategic approaches and commissioned services becoming best practice in the field. Our involvement in the United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme will allow this work to continue, and will establish a sustainable infrastructure of refugee support and refugee integration, both within mainstream services, and in our communities.

The proposal and implementation of the United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme in Lancashire will closely follow the parameters of the local response to the Covid-19 crisis, including government and local guidance, and the recovery of local services. In order to ensure this, relevant officers in Public Health and the Lancashire Resilience Forum will be consulted and, if required, all relevant approvals will be sought.

The global refugee crisis shows no signs of abating. There are currently more than 1.5 million refugees worldwide who are in need of resettlement in a third country, and the Government's continuing commitment to refugee resettlement is placing the United Kingdom at the forefront of global efforts to deal with the refugee crisis. Resettled refugees have complex needs and vulnerabilities, but also bring new assets to the communities where they are resettled – skills, knowledge, social capital and cultural diversity. The county council has been playing a significant and increasing role in supporting not only refugees, but also communities, public services, the third sector and businesses across Lancashire. We are building substantial expertise that is increasingly being used by partners across the region and other parts of the country. This decision will allow this expertise to continue to develop and benefit refugees, hosting communities, services and businesses in Lancashire for years to come.

Consultations

N/A

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Risk management

Not approving the recommendations of this paper would greatly reduce the capacity of local authorities to plan and deliver refugee resettlement in Lancashire. Most local authorities in Lancashire do not have the capacity to plan, commission and deliver the services that are needed to meet our requirements under resettlement programmes. All participating local authorities in Lancashire need the support from the county council, and have reiterated the need for the county council to act as the lead authority in our sub-region. Discontinuing the county council's role would in turn reduce the Government ability to deliver on its refugee resettlement pledges, of which Lancashire and Lancashire County Council have been an integral part.

Financial

All services commissioned and delivered by the county council (including staffing costs) as a result of this decision will be fully funded by Home Office grants, and will have no financial implications to the council. The funding agreement to be signed by all participating local authorities will detail the financial role of the county council (including its status as the lead authority for claiming of grants), and the process by which the other councils will claim their costs.

Legal

The funding provided by the Home Office is through grant agreements, with a Funding Instruction delineating expected outcomes. The county council is revising the previous memorandum of understanding between the participating local authorities so that it sets out the arrangement and the responsibilities of all local authorities participating in the new refugee resettlement scheme. The revised memorandum of understanding will be considered by all participating local authorities.

Equality and cohesion

The decision will have a positive impact on community cohesion as many of the services commissioned by the county council aim at fostering good relations between new refugee communities and established communities in Lancashire. Our services and projects also have regard to protected characteristics and sub-groups within the new refugee communities, particularly age, gender and race. The fact that the refugee integration team sits within the Equality and Cohesion Team means that our refugee resettlement work can draw on established expertise and best practice in equality and cohesion.

Personnel

All staff who will be involved in the United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme in the county council will be fully funded by external grants. Although changes to staffing levels and roles may occur, they will follow usual procedures and approvals.

Procurement

The Lancashire Refugee Resettlement Programme already funds a post that sits in the Procurement Service. If approved, this decision will mean that this resource will continue to support our commissioning activity, and have no financial cost to the council. Having dedicated procurement staff also helps ensure that all our commissioning of refugee integration services adheres strictly to procurement rules.

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
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None		
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Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate		
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