

ISLE OF ANGLESEY COUNTY COUNCIL	
Report to:	The Executive
Date:	17th October, 2016
Subject:	Syrian Refugees : Progress report regarding the delivery of the resettlement and support programme.
Portfolio Holder(s):	Councillor Aled M Jones
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Local Members:	

A –Recommendation/s and reason/s
<p>Recommendations</p> <p>R1 to note the progress made to date</p> <p>R2 to endorse next steps</p> <p>R3 to endorse Officers recommendation for the Council not to participate in the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children National Transfer Scheme. This recommendation to be reviewed in 12 months time.</p> <p>1.0 Introduction</p> <p>1.1 In response to the significant numbers of people fleeing Syria and arriving as refugees in the EU, the Council agreed at its Executive Committee meeting in April 2016 to take part in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlements Scheme (SVPRS) and welcome refugees into Anglesey, as part of the National Scheme. Support for this programme was unanimously received across the Council.</p> <p>1.2 In summary, the key recommendations from the report were that the Council would seek to find suitable accommodation and offer support initially for up to 30 individuals or 10 families over the next 3 years. In year 1, the Council would be accommodating up to a maximum of 10 individuals, with preference would be given to families with children of primary school age.</p> <p>1.3 The refugees were to be housed in private rented sector accommodation,</p>

depending on availability and suitability in the Menai area - more specifically Menai Bridge and Llanfairpwll areas.

1.4 There was also a recommendation that Officers report back to The Executive Board on progress regarding the delivery of the re-settlement and support programme, 6 months from the meeting held in April, 2016.

2.0 Progress

2.1 Early preparation has been key, through the establishment of a working group, chaired by the Assistant Chief Executive with representatives from a range of dedicated partners including the third sector, which has supported officers to prepare the groundwork prior to welcoming the first family to Anglesey.

2.2 The key work streams to practically deliver the SVPRS included:-

- Identification of suitable accommodation;
- The commissioning of appropriate support and translation services;
- Consideration to Education and Health requirements;
- Liaison around community cohesion with partners and local resident engagement in the main, with local Elected Members, Community and Town Councils.
- In depth discussions with colleagues in the Home Office.

2.3 In reality, project managing the preparation for the first Syrian Refugee family has been time-consuming and has impacted on other works streams within the Housing Service. However, we are of the opinion that the work has resulted in the groundwork being in place to welcome future Syrian Refugee families to Anglesey.

2.4 The home for our first family has been provided by a Private Rented Sector landlord, and has been extremely supportive. The negotiation of terms and conditions, fixtures and fittings and ensuring all the services and necessary contractual arrangements were in place, and on times, has been led by the Housing Options Team Manager. (HOTM)

2.5 Key roles have also been played by the Police and the Regional Community Cohesion Co-ordinator to ensure the location was suitable and officers from Education and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board made preparations for school placements and access to the local G.P.Surgery.

2.6 In addition, working with the voluntary group '*Pobl i Bobl*' has proved to be the focal point to offers of community support. This group has also helped in sourcing quality furnishings for the home, and sign posting to local support.

- 2.7 The HOTM and dedicated Support Officer have also been instrumental in helping the family with daily living tasks such as showing how to use the heating, electricity, broadband, ensuring they have adequate supply of food in the house, support to open a bank account and help application for benefit entitlement.
- 2.8 The family of four have been in their new home since end of August and have settled in well. The children are in school, happy and progressing well. A qualified translator service has been commissioned to assist in the school and also to help the family start integrating in the local community.
- 2.9 The provision of a dedicated Support Officer has had a significant impact to help the family resettle into the community and will be a requirement to help with the integration of this and future Syrian families.
- 2.10 The Support Officer has been accompanying the family on days out across the Island, introducing them to the local culture. The family is keen to learn about our culture, the Welsh language and are extremely keen to participate in local community activities. The father has already started volunteering with a local voluntary organisation.
- 2.11 Support offered and experienced shared with other Local Authorities has been valuable, together with support and regular bulletins from the Welsh Local Government Association.

3.0 Challenges

- i. The greatest challenge to date has been finding suitable private rented accommodation in the Menai Bridge and Llanfairpwll areas, which were identified originally as the areas to target.
- ii. Within the areas targeted for accommodation; the availability of placements in the local primary schools.
- iii. Limited information available through 'pen pictures' issued beforehand by the Home Office, makes preparation more difficult.
- iv. Project management and support for the project is time consuming. There is a need to employ a dedicated part-time support officer on for the lifetime of the programme. Costs relating to the SVPRS programme are met by the Home Office.

4.0 Requests to re-settle unaccompanied asylum seeking children

- 4.1 Increased requests for help are being made by the Home Office to local authorities across the UK to re-settle unaccompanied children. In particular, there are two programmes, which are:
The National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

(UASC) and the Vulnerable Children’s Resettlement Programme(VCRP). See Appendix 1 for more details.

4.2 A letter dated 30/08/16 has been received from the Spokesperson for Housing and Welsh language at the Welsh Local Government Association requesting all Welsh Local Authorities to discuss and “*consider whether and how your authority may be able to respond to the requests for help and participation from the Home Office, particularly in terms of the UASC National Transfer Scheme*”.

4.3 Officers have discussed this request and recommend to The Executive that the Council does not participate with the UASC or the VCRP. The reasons being as follows:

- The Council is already receiving a high number of unaccompanied children due to the throughput of passengers through the port in Holyhead;
- The Council is unable to meet their language and culture needs, and often (if not always) unaccompanied children are placed with foster carers located out of county. Therefore, not only do they lose their home, when they are placed out of the county, it makes the link with any area and the feeling of belonging difficult;
- Often we are unable to access appropriate services – these children will have experienced trauma. We do not have the services or specialism to respond.

5.0 Next Steps

- i. We expect to welcome our second Syrian family before Christmas.
- ii. The area where officers are currently looking for a suitable property is between Menai Bridge and Llandegfan. Again this property will be in the private rented sector.
- iii. Officers will continue working with the Education Service and Heads of Primary Schools to identify where gaps exist, to inform our process when choosing the next family from the Home Office Portal.

B – Why is this a decision for the Executive?

Original decision to participate in the SVPRS programme was made by the Executive, with a request to report on progress in 6 months.

C – Is this decision consistent with policy approved by the full Council?

D – Is this decision within the budget approved by the Council?

All costs paid by the Home Office

E – Who did you consult?		What did they say?
1	Chief Executive / Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) (mandatory)	Discussed by the SLT on 19/09/16.
2	Finance / Section 151 (mandatory)	No further comments
3	Legal / Monitoring Officer (mandatory)	
4	Human Resources (HR)	Any appointments to posts should be subject to normal Council recruitment processes and principles.
5	Property	
6	Information Communication Technology (ICT)	
7	Scrutiny	
8	Local Members	
9	Any external bodies / other/s	

E – Risks and any mitigation (if relevant)	
1	Economic
2	Anti-poverty
3	Crime and Disorder
4	Environmental
5	Equalities
6	Outcome Agreements
7	Other

F - Appendices:

Appendix 1

FF - Background papers (please contact the author of the Report for any further information):

Report to The Executive April 2016

Appendix 1

National Transfer Scheme of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

On 1st July the UK Government launched their National Transfer Scheme encouraging all local authorities to voluntarily participate in transfer arrangements between authorities to care for UASC who arrive in the UK and claim asylum to ensure there is a more even distribution of caring responsibilities across the UK. Under the Scheme, a child arriving in one local authority area already under strain caring for UASC may be transferred to another authority that has capacity. In support of the Scheme the Government will provide funding to local authorities caring for UASC, with annual support for each child under 16 at £41,610. The WSMP co-ordinated an event in July for Welsh local authorities to explain the Scheme and hear from senior Home Office officials. Kent Council also attended to explain the pressure they are currently under (they currently accommodate approx. 900 UASC) and the need for other local authorities to play a part in relieving this pressure and to share some learning from their experience. The UASC Transfer Scheme is already operational in England with some UASC already having been transferred between authorities and the Home Office is keen to engage in further discussions and to hear of any pledges Welsh authorities are willing to make. Further details available from www.local.gov.uk)