

**SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS**

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**1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 Argyll and Bute Council, its community planning partners and local communities have indicated a willingness to support the resettlement of the Syrian refugees whose plight has dominated the media over the past few weeks. The Council has indicated to the Scottish Government and CoSLA that the partnership will offer housing and support to 20 refugee families in the first instance with the possibility of more in the future.
- 1.2 It is recommended that Council in line with the constitution endorses my executive decision to offer housing and support to a minimum of 20 families caught up in the Syrian conflict. The executive decision was taken due to the tight timescales for responding to CoSLA and the Scottish Government.

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**2.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 An estimated 9 million Syrians have fled their homes since the outbreak of civil war in March 2011, taking refuge in neighbouring countries or within Syria itself. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), over 3 million have fled to Syria's immediate neighbours Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. 6.5 million are internally displaced within Syria.
- 2.2 On the 7<sup>th</sup> September 2015, the Prime Minister announced that the UK will take 4,000 Syrian refugees each year until 2020, a total of 20,000 to be resettled over that period from refugee camps in countries bordering Syria. A target of 10% of those places has been indicatively allocated to Scotland. There are currently 4 million Syrians registered with the UNCHR who have been designated as refugees.
- 2.3 The Scottish Government has added its support to the response to the refugee crisis and indicated Scotland should accept an initial 1,000 refugees. Following an emergency summit chaired by the First Minister, the Scottish Government has earmarked an initial £1m to help coordinate the response. A Scottish task group has been established and met for the first time on the afternoon of the 8<sup>th</sup> September.
- 2.4 On the 7<sup>th</sup> September, CoSLA made contact with all council leaders and chief executives and sought an indication from each council as to whether it is actively considering becoming involved in resettling refugees and how many it would be able to accommodate. This information is being collated by CoSLA to inform the task group about the likely capacity of Scottish local government to respond to the crisis and ensure the response is adequately resourced and supported.
- 2.5 Given the nature of this emergency and the requirement for an immediate response to CoSLA, I consulted with policy leads and the Leader of the SNP group and then, using the authority given in the Council's Scheme of Administration and Delegations at section 3, para 3 (A) 5, I responded to CoSLA in advance of the task group meeting to confirm the Council's offer to resettle 20 refugee families, with the possibility of more in the future.

### **3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 It is recommended that Council in line with the constitution endorses my executive decision to offer housing and support to a minimum of 20 families caught up in the Syrian conflict. The executive decision was taken due to the tight timescales for responding to CoSLA and the Scottish Government.

### **4.0 DETAIL**

- 4.1 Argyll and Bute's preparations will be made in partnership with our community planning partners and our communities. A Refugee Resettlement Group has been established chaired by the Executive Director of Community Services who will lead this piece of work. The group will meet for the first time on 18 September. Core attendance has been drawn from across the relevant community planning partners and the group will prepare a resettlement plan in conjunction with the fluid and dynamic guidance being developed by both the UK and Scottish Governments. Additional members will be co-opted onto the group as required.
- 4.2 A core element of the resettlement preparations will be available accommodation and Cllr Currie as policy lead for housing raised the issue at a meeting of the strategic housing forum on the 8<sup>th</sup> September to seek the support of the local registered social landlords. The response was very positive and at least one RSL has already written to the Scottish Government pledging their support.
- 4.3 Amongst a wide range of issues that the Refugee Resettlement Group will need to consider will be:
- The appropriate location(s) to settle refugees in Argyll and Bute
  - Provision of appropriately furnished accommodation
  - Support with benefits and assistance with access to employment
  - Registration with local schools and ensuring our schools are ready to welcome and support these children
  - English language and literacy classes
  - Translation services
  - Registering with a local GP/dentist, advice around and referral to appropriate mental health services and to other specialist health services as appropriate
  - Appropriate communications material (printed and web based)
  - The role of community groups in supporting the integration of refugees into our communities
  - Access to the appropriate religious, cultural or faith support networks

## **5.0 CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 Argyll and Bute Council, its community planning partners and local communities have indicated a willingness to support the resettlement of the Syrian refugees which has dominated the media over the past few weeks.
- 5.2 The Council will lead on our preparations to accommodate and support a minimum of 20 families. Preparations will be coordinated by the newly established Refugee Resettlement Group and progress will be reported to the Strategic Management Team, to elected members through Council (or appropriate Committee) and the CPP partners through the CPP Management Committee.

## **6.0 IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Policy – Argyll and Bute Council's response will be in line with Scottish and UK Government policy approaches.
- 6.2 Financial – UK and Scottish Government have indicated that funding will be available. Costs will be monitored by officers from finance and will be reimbursed as per the appropriate scheme.
- 6.3 Legal – None arising from this report.
- 6.4 HR – Any HR implications for staff will be considered by the Refugee Resettlement Group.
- 6.5 Equalities – The Refugee Resettlement Group will consider equalities issues.
- 6.6 Risk – A risk log will be prepared and updated by the Refugee Resettlement Group.
- 6.7 Customer Service – None arising from this report.

**Sally Loudon**  
**Chief Executive**

**Cllr Dick Walsh**  
**Council Leader**

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