

**SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS**

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**1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The Scottish Government contacted CoSLA to seek the support of local authorities and their community planning partners and local communities 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 Community Planning Partnership supports the decision to offer housing and support to a minimum of 20 families caught up in the Syrian conflict.

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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 was collated by CoSLA to inform the task group about the likely capacity of Scottish local government and their community planning partners and local communities 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, the Council's Chief Executive in consultation with Group Leaders used the authority given in the Council's Scheme of Administration and Delegations at section 3, para 3 (A) 5, 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 Community Planning Partnership supports the decision to offer housing and support to a minimum of 20 families caught up in the Syrian conflict.

### **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 (RRG) has been established chaired by the Executive Director of Community Services who will lead this piece of work. The group met 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. A copy of the draft Terms of Reference for the Group is appended to this report.
- 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 The Council Leader and Executive Director of Community Services attended an all authority briefing meeting hosted by CoSLA which featured information and advice from the Home Office, the Scottish Government, the Scottish Refugee Council and a couple of authorities who have participated in refugee resettlement over the last couple of years. The Council has written to CoSLA to urge for the development of a guidance manual distilling the learning from those authorities that would be available to all other authorities who will be involved in resettlement for the first time to avoid duplication of effort and reduce the risk of repetitive mistakes.
- 4.4 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

4.5 The RRG focused its first meeting on action planning and agreed a number of workstreams and individual tasks that will be taken forward with a level of urgency. This forms the basis of a detailed project plan which consolidates these actions based on a notional lead in time. CoSLA will also engage with the UK and Scottish Governments to define the financial package that will support community planning partnerships to meet the costs associated with the resettlement programme.

4.6 The success of the resettlement programme and the integration of refugee families will be heavily contingent on the shared responsibility and commitment of all community planning partners and our local communities.

## **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 the community planning partnership's 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 Community Planning Partnership'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 the council's finance services 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.

**Cleland Sneddon**  
**Executive Director of Community Services**

For further information contact:

Cleland Sneddon  
Executive Director of Community Services

Morag Brown  
Business Improvement Manager, Community Services

19 September 2015

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

### Meeting Title: Refugee Resettlement Group

#### Remit

Argyll and Bute Council has as a result of the ongoing Syrian crisis, made a commitment to the Scottish Government through COSLA to offer housing and support to 20 refugee families, with the possibility of more in the future.

The remit of the Refugee Resettlement Group is to ensure that Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partners has the appropriate provision in place for these families to settle in Argyll and Bute. In particular the group will consider:

- I. The appropriate location(s) to settle refugees in Argyll and Bute.
- II. Provision of appropriately furnished accommodation
- III. Support with benefits and assistance with access to employment,
- IV. Registration with local schools and ensuring our schools are ready to welcome and support these children
- V. English language and literacy classes
- VI. Translation services
- VII. Registering with a local GP/dentist, advice around and referral to appropriate mental health services and to other specialist health services as appropriate
- VIII. Appropriate communications material (printed and web based)
- IX. The role of community groups in supporting the integration of refugees into our communities
- X. Access to the appropriate religious or faith support networks
- XI. The financial implications and appropriate reimbursement mechanisms

#### Reporting and Accountability

The Refugee Resettlement Group is accountable for the above remit and reports to the Strategic Management Team and to elected members through Council (or appropriate Committee) and the CPP partners through the CPP Management Committee.

Different work packages being taken forward will also, where appropriate, inform Departmental Management Teams.

Minutes will be shared with the Chief Executive, Executive Directors and the Council Leader and Depute.

In addition a summary of the key actions from each meeting will be prepared and shared with Heads of Service and their management teams.

<b>Membership</b>	
<b>Name</b>	<b>Designation</b>
Cleland Sneddon (Chair)	Executive Director, Community Services
Morag Brown	Business Improvement Manager
Donald MacVicar	Head of Community and Culture
Christina West	Chief Officer - Integration
Alasdair MacGregor	Chief Executive, ACHA
Colin Renfrew	Chief Executive, Fyne Homes
Lorraine McGinty	Team Leader, Revenue and Benefits
David Forshaw	Principal Accountant
Glenn Heritage	Argyll and Bute Third Sector Interface
Ann Marie Knowles	Head of Education
Louise Long	Chief Social Work Officer
TBC	Welfare Rights
TBC	Adult Learning
TBC	Educational Psychologist
TBC	Communications
TBC	Police Scotland
Associate members:	
Fraser Durie	Principal, Argyll College
Iain Jackson	Governance and Risk Manager
Rona Gold	Community Planning Manager
Ishabel Bremner	Employability Partnership
TBC	Fire & Rescue Service

#### **Frequency of Meetings**

As required – to meet the urgency of the resettlement programme

#### **Administrative Arrangements**

Meetings will be supported by Morag Brown whose contact details are:  
 Morag Brown, Business Improvement Manager, Community Services  
 morag.brown@argyll-bute.gov.uk  
 Tel 01546 604199

**Date TOR Agreed: 18 September 2015**

**Review Date:**