

Refugee Resettlement Programme Update

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Argyll and Bute Council agreed to resettle Syrian refugee families through the Home Office's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme in 2015. We support refugee families to rebuild their lives on the island of Bute. The SVPR scheme has now been replaced with a wider United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme under the same terms and support requirements.
- 1.2 Argyll and Bute resettlement programme has been successful and Bute offers a safe place to recover from trauma. The strength of the partnership working, support from the local community and the commitment to improve the lives of our refugee families by everyone involved, continues to drive the success of the programme.
- 1.3 Since 2015 we have continued to resettle refugees on Bute and now that refugee resettlement, which was on hold due to Covid, has started back up again with appropriate health and wellbeing measures in place, we would look to welcome new families to the island.

It is recommended that the Council:

- a) Notes the Council's continued involvement in the resettlement of refugees, on the island of Bute, through the Home Office UK Resettlement Scheme; and
- b) Notes the continued good work of the Refugee Resettlement Group and the local community in resettling refugees on the island of Bute.

Refugee Resettlement Programme Update

2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Argyll and Bute's refugee resettlement programme was established in 2015. The programme provides a humanitarian response to refugees who are unable to return to their country of origin. Argyll and Bute's success is the supportive, warm and welcoming communities who help us to offer a safe and peaceful location for refugee families to recover from the trauma of their past.
- 2.2 The programme focuses its resettlement activities on the island of Bute which has a declining population, an availability of social housing and capacity in both the primary and secondary schools. The refugees resettled on Bute see the island as a safe haven and a friendly community. The refugee resettlement programme ensures that there are services in place and we have a team of dedicated and committed multilingual employees who support the families to rebuild their lives.
- 2.3 The programme we participated in is the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPR). Which is fully funded by the UK Government (Home Office) to meet the commitment by former PM David Cameron to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees in the UK by 2020. The UK has met this commitment, all 4 nations participated and all 32 Scottish Local Authorities have a resettlement programme. The SVPR commitment was to resettle the most vulnerable and the refugees were living in camps or temporary accommodation in the countries surrounding Syria – Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq and Turkey.
- 2.4 The SVPR programme has now been replaced with a worldwide resettlement scheme, United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme (UKRS). This acknowledges that Syrian refugees are not the only nationality of peoples who have fled conflict and are seeking resettlement in another country. The UKRS provides the same financial tariff and guidance as its predecessor and the scheme will broadly work in the same way. Local Authorities will still be able to accept or reject cases and essential for a programme such as our own set criteria for matching, for Argyll and

Bute this would be Arabic speaking, smaller families and non-complex medical conditions.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 It is recommended that the Council:

- a) Notes the Council's continued involvement in the resettlement of refugees, on the island of Bute, through the Home Office UK Resettlement Scheme; and
- b) Notes the continued good work of the Refugee Resettlement Group and the local community in resettling refugees on the island of Bute.

4.0 DETAIL

4.1 The decision to participate in refugee resettlement was an executive decision by the then Chief Executive Sally Loudon which was homologated at the Council meeting on 24 September 2015. Update reports on the resettlement programme have been provided to elected members at Council each autumn since 2016.

4.2 Since the resettlement programme began in 2015 we have resettled 34 refugee families on the Isle of Bute. Not all families chose to remain on the island and we are currently supporting 12 families. From the beginning of 2016 and the resettlement of our phase 2 families we have resettled 3 or 4 families each year.

4.3 The SVPR programme is fully funded by the Home Office. There is a tariff we receive for families for 5 years of support which tapers from year 1 to 5. We are also very successful at applying for additional funding and since 2019 we have brought in an additional £30k to the programme from various grants. Families are free to move in the UK, our families often move to the mainland for work.

4.4 The refugee families resettled in Bute are all from Syria, are Arabic speaking and have lost their homes, their jobs, their places of work. Many have been imprisoned and tortured and all have lost relatives and friends and do not know if family members (brothers, cousins, uncles, nephews) are alive or dead as they are still living in a war zone. The families are separated from extended family and for many there is little likelihood they will ever see them in person again. Families who have met the criteria for resettlement in the UK are matched to their resettlement area. We can decline a family if we and our partner agencies Health and Education feel their needs would not be best met in Bute.

4.5 There is housing available in Rothesay and we work with the Registered Social Landlords, ACHA and Fyne Homes, to identify and make ready appropriate accommodation. We decorate and furnish each property, funded by SVPR budget. We also accept donations so that each child arrives to a bedroom filled with appropriate warm clothing and toys.

- 4.6 All of the Syrian children attend Rothesay Joint Campus (3-18 school). We have children in ELC, primary and secondary. The children enjoy school and are flourishing. They did struggle with home schooling but despite this the children are all learning English very quickly. We have additional support in school to help the children including ASN assistants and an EAL teacher (English as an additional language). The EAL support in place benefits all of the children at the school where English isn't their first language.
- 4.7 The council's Community Learning team provide English lessons for the adults, ESOL tutors and a coordinator are paid for from the SVPR budget. The Home Offices requires us to deliver minimum of 8 hours accredited (SQA) ESOL each week. Pre-lockdown we made learning English fun by organising activities and trips. We have substituted this with guest speakers giving talks on a wide variety of topics relating to life in Scotland. We make sure we make learning relevant by tailoring English lessons to the family's needs and the job market. We had arranged for childcare at a local playgroup whilst our women attend classes and in the past we also ran practical courses in partnership with Argyll College. In March 2020 due to lockdown our learning moved on line and is still delivered using a virtual platform which has been challenging as many of the refugees have poor IT skills.
- 4.8 The refugees are entitled to receive benefits and work in the UK. Our employability programme helps them to volunteer and gain work experience in the community hopefully leading to long term sustainable employment. We have had a number of adults move into work and pre the pandemic around 80% of our adults were engaged in employment activities or in work. We also help refugees to apply to study at colleges and universities. We teach IT skills, literacy and numeracy and we support them to gain certificates which might help lead to employment such as Food Hygiene. Business Gateway provide support for business start-ups and the barbers shop and patisserie have both expanded and opened premises on the mainland. Some start-ups have been less successful and the take-away and food van have now closed, Covid having a huge impact on trade.
- 4.9 To deliver and coordinate this support we employ three staff, two Arabic Speaking Support Workers and an ESOL coordinator. In addition we fund the ESOL tutors delivering English lessons and we fund the ASN assistants at Rothesay Joint Campus. We commission Bute Advice Centre to provide budgeting and welfare advice and we purchase child care placements at Rothesay Playgroup.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 During the pandemic we have continue to work in partnership and we provide person centred support for each family. All our support is currently being delivered virtually and remotely with staff working from home. We haven't resettled any

new families since January 2020, when 3 families arrived. We have sufficient budget to deliver services and meet commitments until 2024 but will need to resettle families under the new scheme if the programme is to continue without either tapering down to a close or drawing on council funding.

- 5.2 The UKRS scheme has now started, worldwide resettlement had been on hold due to Covid travel restrictions. UKRS cases are now arriving in the UK and COSLA in their role as Strategic Migration Partner and the Home Office are asking local authorities to confirm their commitment. We have indicated to COSLA that we would resettle up to 3 families per year under this new scheme. There is capacity in the support arrangements and the services have the ability to support more families than the current 12.
- 5.3 The resettlement programme on Bute has been very successful the council's Best Value 3 report, Joint Inspection of Childrens Services, INEA all recognised the programme as an example of good practice. In addition the Bute community won the inaugural Pride of Scotland Award in 2020 in recognition of their support and the programme won a COSLA Excellence Award 2019 for Supporting Refugees into Work. Scottish Universities in partnership with their European counterparts (GLIMMER project) highlighted our employability programme as best practice. A delegation from Finland travelled to Rothesay Joint Campus and wrote a paper on the outstanding approach to integration within schools which should be copied. Australian film makers came to Bute to film with us to show their audience how resettlement could be done really well across the world, we were the only UK project featured. Italian NGOs have adopted our Employability strategy and delivery approach. We created our own evaluation tool methodology and earlier this year the Northern Ireland government contacted us as they wanted to replicate our approach across NI and were looking to take some of our good practice and build it into their programme.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Policy – No implications
- 6.2 Financial – Resettlement funding is received from the Home Office and the SVPR budget is fully committed with a contingency in place to deal with unexpected costs. The UKRS programme offers the same funding levels.
- 6.3 Legal – No implications
- 6.4 HR – A number of posts have been created on a temporary basis to support the refugee programme and funded by the Home Office grant
- 6.5 Fairer Scotland Duty
- 6.5.1 Equalities – protected characteristics
- All staff working with refugee families have received Equalities training.
- 6.5.2 Socio-economic duty

No implications

6.5.3 Islands

No implications

6.6 Risk – No implications

6.7 Customer Service – Translating material into Arabic has been an important consideration to ensure refugees can access information and use local services.

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