

## PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCIL

7 October 2015

## Resettling Families in the Local Area

Report by Depute Chief Executive (Corporate &amp; Community Development Services)

**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To update members on the Council's commitment to offer accommodation and support for refugees from Syria and provide information on the arrival of the first Syrian families to the area.

**1. BACKGROUND / MAIN ISSUES**

- 1.1 In 2014 COSLA circulated a briefing to local authorities advising of a scheme for the accommodation of Syrian refugees who have fled the ongoing conflict in that country. The UK Government then announced that it intended to relocate some of the most vulnerable refugees under what it has termed the Vulnerable Persons' Relocation scheme and sought notifications from local authorities wanting to be involved in supporting this process. Recent press coverage has highlighted the plight of refugees and the UK and Scottish Governments have responded by agreeing new intake numbers and stepping up the national organisational response to the crisis. In this respect there is a process to be followed, which is led by the Home Office. The Home Office screen and evaluate the needs of the refugees and then work with Local Authorities to ensure the appropriate levels of support are in place for the re-settlement of families into our communities.
- 1.2 In March 2014 the Housing and Health Committee approved a position statement supporting Syrian refugees (Report 14/117), following which the Council notified the UK Government's Home Office of our willingness to participate in the relocation scheme.
- 1.3 NHS Tayside and other community planning partners were briefed on the Committee decision and invited to participate in principle to plan to receive refugees, subject to clarity on the details of the relocation scheme. COSLA took on a co-ordination role between the Local Authorities and the Home Office to consolidate understanding of the details of the scheme. At that time three local authorities were involved in discussions, including this Council.
- 1.4 It was not until later in 2014 that activity developed, and by December 2014, Glasgow City Council was the only authority in Scotland to have taken refugees, which is the current position. Glasgow was already involved in the United Nations Human Council for Refugees (UNHCR) Syria Humanitarian Admission Programme which was then to run in parallel with the Syrian Vulnerable Persons' Relocation Scheme operated by the Home Office and had previous and ongoing extensive experience with refugee resettlement programmes.

- 1.5 In March 2015 Council officers contacted the Home Office for an update on progress and were asked to submit a range of information on how the programme would work in Perth and Kinross. The Home Office also confirmed Glasgow City Council would be a transit reception centre for Scotland. This was the first indication from the Home Office of the information required from Perth and Kinross on the resettlement of the Syrian Refugees.
- 1.6 Housing and Community Care managers then convened a multi-agency working group to prepare a plan for receiving and supporting a small number of refugees. This group includes staff from NHS Tayside, MEAD (Minority Ethic Access Development), Police Scotland and Education and Children's Services colleagues. Specialist input is also provided by the Council's Welfare Rights staff and legal services.
- 1.7 Home Office funding of £100k has been agreed to fund three staff: support, interpreting and admin officers, who are now in post. The Home Office is also funding accommodation costs (the funding is for one year only) and families will be resettled into private sector rented accommodation. Thus not affecting the availability of social rented housing to those on the Common Housing Register.

## **2. CURRENT POSITION**

- 2.1 The arrival of refugees under this scheme has been slower and later than anticipated, with the Home Office indicating that 150 people would have arrived by the end of 2014/15. Glasgow currently has 13 families and Perth and Kinross is ready to accept up to 5 families (30 people) by December 2015. The first family is due imminently.
- 2.2 Following discussions with the Home Office, a Perth and Kinross action plan was submitted to the Home Office in July 2015 after which funding was confirmed by them and a meeting arranged to finalise the number and profile of families to be accommodated in this area, based on their needs. The nature of this scheme is that the families are very vulnerable following harrowing treatment in their homeland and on route to refugee camps in neighbouring countries. Many will have been subject to torture and violence, with women and children at risk or in need of medical care.
- 2.3 Due to the escalating crisis in the last few weeks, the UK government has agreed to accept more refugees, possibly 20,000 over the next five years, of which the Scottish Government has agreed to accept Scotland's share, of at least 10% or about 2,000 people. The Perth and Kinross 'fair share' of this based on population distribution would be around 50 people.
- 2.4 The Scottish Government has responded recently by setting up a Task Force Group to organise a national response to the refugee crisis. The Council, as one of the early adopters of the Vulnerable Persons' Relocation Scheme, was invited to be represented on the Task Force Group and the Council Leader attends the group. The Housing Service Manager chairs the multi-agency P&K Operation Group and is also a member of the Task Force - Accommodation Sub Group.

2.5 A number of local people have contacted the Council to offer support, including accommodation. However, the number of people to be relocated is determined by the Home Office and small, at the moment. Also, given the complex circumstances and needs of those being relocated, the accommodation and support needs to be carefully planned. The local multi-agency group will continue to lead this process. It is anticipated, however, that local people will continue to offer other types of practical help with goods and supplies, as well as financial donations, to national and local 3<sup>rd</sup> sector organisations.

### **3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

3.1 The Council has been very positive and proactive in offering and planning to accept, accommodate and support some very vulnerable refugees and is one of a few Scottish Local Authorities to have done so. Council officers have been in direct contact with both CoSLA and the Home Office for over a year in anticipation of the launch of the UK Government's Vulnerable Persons' Relocation Scheme and in the past month have had confirmation from the Home Office that families will now begin arriving. Council staff and partners are prepared and accommodation and support are in place to welcome and support these very vulnerable individuals.

3.2 The UK Government has increased the number of people to be resettled, to 20,000 and the Scottish Government has planned to receive around 2,000 people. Perth and Kinross has actively participated in the UK Vulnerable Persons' Relocation Scheme and is planning to receive 5 families (around 30 people) over the next few months, with the first family due imminently. We are confident that, due to the work and preparation already in place, these families will be resettled and the Council will continue to work with the Scottish Government Task Force and Home Office on future plans for resettlement of families.

3.3 The Council is asked to:

- (i) Note this report;
- (ii) Support the arrival of refugees through the Vulnerable Persons' Relocation Scheme and the additional refugees who may be relocated following UK Government agreement to accept more refugees.

**Author**

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**Approved**

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John Walker	Depute Chief Executive (Corporate and Community Development Services)	22 September 2015

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## 1. IMPLICATIONS, ASSESSMENTS, CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

<b>Strategic Implications</b>	<b>Yes / None</b>
Community Plan / Single Outcome Agreement	<b>Yes</b>
Corporate Plan	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Resource Implications</b>	
Financial	<b>Yes</b>
Workforce	<b>Yes</b>
Asset Management (land, property, IST)	<b>None</b>
<b>Assessments</b>	
Equality Impact Assessment	<b>None</b>
Strategic Environmental Assessment	<b>None</b>
Sustainability (community, economic, environmental)	<b>None</b>
Legal and Governance	<b>None</b>
Risk	<b>None</b>
<b>Consultation</b>	
Internal	<b>Yes</b>
External	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Communication</b>	
Communications Plan	<b>Yes</b>

### 1. Strategic Implications

#### Community Plan / Single Outcome Agreement

1.1 The Single Outcome Agreement for Perth and Kinross has five outcomes which provide clear strategic direction, inform decisions at a corporate and service level and shape resources allocation. The following are relevant to this report.

- Giving every child the best start in life
- Developing educated, responsible and informed citizens
- Promoting a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy
- Supporting people to lead independent, healthy and active lives
- Creating a safe and sustainable place for future generations

#### Corporate Plan

1.2 The proposal relates to the Council's Corporate Plan Objectives as detailed above.

## 2. Resource Implications

### Financial

- 2.1 The Home Office has funded three posts at a cost of £100k to support the Vulnerable Person's Relocation Scheme for one year. In addition, accommodation costs, including rent, will be paid by the Home Office for the first year people are resettled and final costs are to be confirmed.

### Workforce

- 2.2 Two temporary posts have been approved and are now in post with a third post being recruited through the MEAD project.

### Asset Management (land, property, IT)

- 2.3 None

## 3. Assessments

### Equality Impact Assessment

- 3.1 Assessed as **not relevant** and the following positive outcomes expected following implementation:

### Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 3.2 The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 places a duty on the Council to identify and assess the environmental consequences of its proposals.

This section should reflect that the proposals have been considered under the Act and no further action is required as it does not qualify as a PPS as defined by the Act and is therefore exempt.

### Risk

- 3.3 This will be determined when further information becomes available.

## 4. Consultation

### Internal

- 4.1 The Heads of Finance and Legal Services have been consulted on this report.

### External

- 4.2 None

**5. Communication**

5.1 None

**2. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

**3. APPENDICES**

None

