

Report

Report to:	Housing and Technical Resources Committee
Date:	24 April 2024
Report by:	Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources)

Subject:	Refugee Resettlement Programme Review
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ provide an update on refugee resettlement within South Lanarkshire
- ◆ advise Committee of name change for the service

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. Housing and Technical Resources Committee is asked to approve the following recommendations:-

- (1) to note that the Refugee Resettlement Programme continues to provide support on the basis approved by the Housing and Technical Resources Committee on 29 January 2020 (providing support to up to 30 families per year); and
- (2) that the change in the name of the service from Refugee Resettlement Team to Refugee and Asylum Support Team be noted.

3. Background

- 3.1. The Refugee Resettlement Programme was established in 2015 when South Lanarkshire partners were involved in assisting families fleeing from the Syrian civil war. At this point, a new team was established within Housing and Technical Resources, the Refugee Resettlement Service, which was responsible for leading on resettlement in South Lanarkshire, including liaison with all relevant services such as health and education.
- 3.2. Commencing April 2020, the Home Office brought together a range of resettlement programmes to ensure parity of financial support and assistance and introduced the UK Resettlement Programme (UKRS) which aims to support refugees from any country determined as requiring assistance by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees.
- 3.3. At that time, South Lanarkshire Council's Executive Committee, 29 January 2020, approved a consolidated approach committing to support up to 10% of the Scottish equivalent of the proposed 5000 UK wide arrivals per year, equating to approximately 30 households for South Lanarkshire (150 individuals).
- 3.4. However anticipated numbers were not achieved due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, resulting in suspension of all Resettlement Programmes from early 2020 until 2022.

- 3.5. During 2021, a further 3 new programmes were initiated to support Afghan nationals fleeing the country following the withdrawal of British and American military services and supported by South Lanarkshire partners, this resulted in 12 individuals settling in the area.
- 3.6. The Ukrainian emergency in March 2022 resulted in a mass movement of the population to surrounding countries. The UK Government initiated the Homes for Ukraine Scheme to allow families to travel under the Ukrainian Displaced Persons visa to stay with host families across the country.
- 3.7. The Scottish Government developed a further programme linked to Homes for Ukraine which enabled the Scottish Government to become the hosts, the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme (SSS). This allowed individuals/families to enter Scotland directly without a host family in place. Visa applications under the SSS scheme are currently suspended.
- 3.8. South Lanarkshire was one of a number of local authorities across Scotland which supported Ukrainians who arrived through the Super Sponsor Scheme in hotels.
- 3.9. Home Office funding covers the costs associated with all planned refugee programmes detailed in this report.
- 3.10. Arrivals through any of the Resettlement Programmes have immediate recourse to public funds and will have the right to work in the UK. Although there is variance in length of visas related to the various programmes.

4. Current Situation

- 4.1. Over the first five years of the Syrian Resettlement Programme (now UKRS) the Refugee Resettlement Team supported approximately 210 individuals.
- 4.2. Families (12 individuals) who arrived from Afghanistan have also been provided with support to integrate into South Lanarkshire communities.
- 4.3. The unexpected Ukrainian situation resulted in significant resettlement need across neighbouring countries, including the UK. South Lanarkshire Council supported approximately 1,000 individuals through welcome accommodation, and in the wider local authority area.
- 4.4. The Refugee Resettlement Team provided support to residents across 4 Scottish Government procured hotels in the area as well as assisting approximately 250 guests in over 150 hosting arrangements. Approximately 100 households have been accommodated and over 170 individuals have been supported to secure longer term accommodation options.
- 4.5. Wider humanitarian programmes were suspended whilst the UK and Scottish Government focused on the Ukrainian Displaced Person Programme (UDP), with very limited arrivals over the last 2 years via the UKRS programme.
- 4.6. Afghan arrivals to the UK increased during the latter months of 2023 and new arrivals are expected in South Lanarkshire over the coming months via a formal partnership between the Ministry of Defence and Mears. This is fully funded by the UK Government, accommodation is obtained from the private sector and support provided by the Refugee Resettlement Team, again funded by the Home Office.

- 4.7. In addition to Refugee Resettlement programmes, the Home Office has established accommodation hubs for asylum seekers who are currently being dispersed across the UK while awaiting a determination of their immigration status. Currently there is one hotel in the South Lanarkshire area which is supported by the Home Office. The Refugee Resettlement Team attend on a regular basis to provide information and advice to residents on relevant services available and to provide support when refugee status is awarded, with a view to preventing homelessness as far as possible.
- 4.8. The Service, therefore, now encompasses assistance to Asylum Seekers and, as such, the Service name will be amended to Asylum and Refugee Resettlement Service.
- 4.9. The operating context in relation to the provision of support and accommodation for asylum seekers has become increasingly challenging, particularly when considered alongside the extreme pressures which continue to be faced in relation to homelessness.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1. It is proposed that South Lanarkshire Council continue to assist a proportionate share of refugee resettlement in Scotland on the basis of previous Committee approval, that is up to 30 households per year for the next two years, 2024/25 and 2025/26.
- 5.2. It is proposed that a further report will be presented to the Housing and Technical Resources Committee before the end of the current financial year updating on progress with national programmes and detailing recommendations for the future level and nature of involvement by the Council, taking account of national and, therefore, South Lanarkshire's proportionate share.

6. Employee Implications

- 6.1. No employee implications related to this report, other than noting proposed name change of service to Asylum and Refugee Resettlement service, reflecting existing work of team.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1. Costs relating to all establishment proposals are covered from existing funds from UKRS programme, Afghan programmes, and Ukrainian programme to date. However, the Asylum and Resettlement Service supported the Scottish Government's Warm Scottish Welcome, which supported Ukrainians within welcome hotels and whilst costs were previously fully covered for this, the Scottish Government announced mid-2023, that funding for 2023/24 would no longer be provided. This position changed in March 2024, when the Scottish Government announced there was £5m funding to cover services provided within welcome hotels across the country. South Lanarkshire Council have submitted a claim for £0.400m for support services provided during this time and await the outcome of this. For new and ongoing planned UKRS and Afghan arrivals, the Home Office and UK Government funding mechanisms will contribute to future financial considerations.

8. Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications

- 8.1. There are no implications for climate change, sustainability or the environment in terms of the information contained in this report.

9. Other Implications

- 9.1. There are no risk implications in terms of the information contained in this report.

10. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

10.1. No equalities Impact Assessment was undertaken for the information contained within this report as the Programme arrangements are outwith the control of the Council.

10.2. Trade unions have been updated in terms of the content of this report.

Stephen Gibson

Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources)

21 March 2024

Link(s) to Council Values/Priorities/Outcomes

Working with and respecting others

Previous References

Scheme of Delegation – 12 May 2022

Executive Committee Report – 29 January 2020

For further information please contact:-

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