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**REPORT TO: MORAY COUNCIL ON 15 SEPTEMBER 2021**

**SUBJECT: RESETTLEMENT AND RELOCATION SCHEMES**

**BY: CHIEF OFFICER, HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE MORAY**

**1. REASON FOR REPORT**

1.1 To obtain approval to participate in the following Resettlement and Relocation Schemes and to subsequently advise the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA) of Moray Council's commitment towards:

- Afghanistan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP) Scheme (Emergency Response) to support Afghan Locally Employed Staff (LES).
- National Transfer Scheme to support Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.

1.2 This report is submitted to Council in terms of Section III (B) (36) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to exercise the statutory power of the Council to advance well-being under the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

**2.1 It is recommended that the Council:**

- i) **agrees to participate in the Afghan Relocation Scheme;**
- ii) **agrees to participate in the National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children;**
- iii) **note the Council's positions in respect of the current and future Resettlement Schemes;**
- iv) **agrees to allocate funding for a dedicated resettlement team;**
- v) **delegates authority to the Head of Housing and Property to negotiate and agree terms for the lease of Ministry of Defence (MOD) housing stock; and**
- vi) **notes the precedent for any allocations of social housing under related schemes to be made by the Housing Needs Review Group.**

### **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The 1951 UN convention relating to the status of Refugees is the framework which underpins international refugee protections. It, along with the 1967 Protocol, clearly sets out the definition of a refugee, along with the legal protection, assistance and social rights a refugee is entitled to receive. It also highlights the obligations of refugees towards their host country.
- 3.2 Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA) is coordinating refugee resettlement efforts between all 32 Scottish local authorities. Refugee resettlement schemes seek to resettle the most vulnerable adults and children's who have fled violence in their home country. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) refers refugees to the UK Government for relocation through resettlement programmes. People who are selected by the UNHCR are some of the most vulnerable refugees in the MENA (Middle-East and North Africa) region and fall under one or more of the following vulnerability criteria; women, children and young people at risk; people in severe need of medical care; survivors of torture and violence; refugees with legal and or protection needs; refugees with medical needs or disabilities; persons at risk due to their sexual orientation or gender identity; and refugees with links in resettlement countries.

#### **Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement (SVPR) Scheme**

- 3.3 In 2016, the Council responded to an urgent request from the UK Government and CoSLA's Strategic Migration Partnership to assist those refugees displaced from Syria. As a result, the Council committed to resettle seven families (equating to 13 adults and 14 children) with continued support over the past five years under this Scheme. Most recently six out of seven families have been supported to complete their "leave to remain" application, biometrics, which allows permanent residency in the UK.
- 3.4 This current scheme concluded in March 2020 and is replaced by the UK Resettlement Scheme (ref 3.5) that broadens the geographical schemes beyond the MENA regions with continued funding in place.

#### **United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme (UKRS)**

- 3.5 The UKRS is an open ended scheme that intends to provide sanctuary for refugees in greatest need of protection, including those requiring urgent medical treatment, survivors of violence and torture, and women and children at risk. It is hoped 5,000 of the most vulnerable refugees can be resettled in the UK in 2021/22. Current [Home Office funding rates](#) have been retained.
- 3.6 Given the Council's commitment to Syrian VPR scheme, the Council have not committed to taking any families through this route at this current time.

#### **National Transfer Scheme (NTS) - Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)**

- 3.7 The National Transfer Scheme for UASC provides a statutory mechanism for unaccompanied children to be transferred between an entry local authority to

another local authority in the UK, facilitating a more even distribution of responsibility across the UK.

- 3.8 The NTS has been open to Local Authorities since 2018. The Scottish Government and CoSLA are asking all local authorities to accept 0.07% of their total child population, this equates to 1 child each year in Moray. Currently it is mainly young males aged 16-18 requiring support through the scheme and as such are classified as looked after children with obligation under the Children and Young Persons (Scotland) Act 2014 and associated Corporate Parenting responsibilities.
- 3.9 [Financial support](#) is offered per night at a low and high rate of £114 to £143, which ceases when the child turns 18yrs old, unless they continue in further education. The higher rate is awarded if the number of children exceeds 0.07% of the ONS 2020 Mid-Year Child Population Estimate for the council area.

### **Afghanistan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP) Scheme (Emergency Response)**

- 3.10 [ARAP Scheme](#) launched on 1 April 2021, to support the relocation of the Locally Employed Staff (LES) to the UK, in recognition of their commitment and bravery shown by local staff who supported UK forces in Afghanistan. The situation in Afghanistan is changing dynamically and relocation is becoming more urgent as NATO withdraws by September 2021.
- 3.11 On 3 June 2021, the UK government formally wrote to all Local Authority Chief Executives and Council Leaders across the UK, seeking support for the accelerated relocation of LES who has been supporting the UK in Afghanistan. UK Government plans to relocate 3000 individuals by the end of August.
- 3.12 Funding is provided for 12 months for local authorities to provide a package of intensive support to individuals or families, following which self-sufficiency is the intended outcome. Funding package is to support accommodation set up, rent and other housing related costs, together with funding for the delivery of integration support covering a range of areas including; advice and education services for school aged children. The offer will also be enhanced through additional central government integration support, including an online welcome pack for all new arrivals and local engagement networks for participating local authorities to share information and resources.

### **Afghanistan Citizens Resettlement (ACR) Scheme**

- 3.13 [ACR scheme](#) is the UK governments new bespoke resettlement route for Afghan refugees. Thousands of Afghans most in need, including women, girls and children will be prioritised given their particular vulnerability. The UK Government aims to deliver one of its most ambitious resettlement schemes to welcome 5000 Afghans in year one, with a total of 20,000 in the long term.
- 3.14 The UK Government is working urgently to open this route. Further details will be announced in due course.

## **Proposed Resettlement Team**

- 3.15 The Council's previous involvement in Syrian Refugee Scheme, has allowed Officers, services and agencies to gain experience, learnings and skills to support future schemes. The principle learning is to create a dedicated resettlement team to coordinate the multiple resettlement programmes.
- 3.16 The vision for Morays resettlement programme is to place equal value and importance on capacity building of the individual refugee, family and settled community, as resettlement essentials are identified as access to housing, health, education and employment. An underpinning community development approach ensures creative solutions can be found with people and communities to support a flourish, connected community for all.
- 3.17 The resettlement team required to meet the needs of incoming refugees will need to have a wide ranging mix of professional backgrounds including housing, social work, education, community development. The team will be on Council terms and conditions and will be funded by the Home Office through resettlement funds attached to each refugee. An initial team will consist of 1FTE Grade 10 Resettlement Co-Ordinator and 3 x FTE Grade 5 Support Workers (grades indicative and subject to confirmation by HR). These temporary posts will initially be for 12 months, with potential to extend dependent on scheme funding.
- 3.18 Dedicated support for any unaccompanied minors received will also be required and this will be established following confirmation and establishment of needs of young people received with further detail on staffing and costs brought back to a subsequent committee. Seeking dedicated supported lodgings or foster care arrangements for these young people paid at existing rates is envisaged.

## **Housing**

- 3.19 The most pressing need for housing under the ARAP scheme is for larger family properties given household size, typically three and four bedroom properties. There tends to be a lower turnover of these properties in the social sector, therefore any allocation by the Council or Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) would necessitate a reasonable lead-in time and be likely to deliver smaller property sizes (two and three bedrooms).
- 3.20 Initial contact has been made with the MOD regarding service accommodation in the area which is understood to be vacant pending a long-term decision and would meet the needs of larger families. The intention would be for the Council can lease some of these properties on behalf of families being resettled under the ARAP scheme.
- 3.21 Whilst formal agreement would need to be negotiated, this is an arrangement which has been entered into elsewhere in the UK and correspondence received from the Secretary of State for Defence indicates a strategic alignment of objectives.
- 3.22 Subject to agreement with the MOD, the Council would seek to lease the properties for a minimum period of two years in order to sublet them to families

being assisted under the scheme. Funding would broadly mirror the previous scheme to assist Syrian households, with initial setup costs being met and thereafter welfare benefits entitlement assisting with rent costs as required.

- 3.23 Should households require to move within the initial term, their needs would be considered under the scheme of allocations and if requiring a move to permanent accommodation after the initial period, the Housing Needs Review Group would assign priority on a similar basis as under the Syrian scheme. We would also invite local RSLs to participate. This would also be the arrangement should accommodation be required to participate in the scheme in the event that negotiations with the MOD are unsuccessful.

#### **4. KEY MATTERS RELEVANT TO RECOMMENDATION**

- 4.1 Given the spirit of the ARAP scheme and the rapid deterioration of the situation in Afghanistan, it is proposed that the Council agrees to participate in this scheme. Taking into account the current and ongoing demands for accommodation across Moray accompanied by early negotiations with the MOD to utilise surplus military housing, it is recommended that the Council's contribution to the scheme is up to 10 properties with MOD assistance, or 5 properties if required to allocate social housing. It is noted that in the latter instance the household sizes would be smaller.
- 4.2 As of 1 Sep 21, CoSLA has written to CSWO across Scotland requesting Local Authorities to participate in the NTS for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children with children arriving to Scotland in October. Given the immediate need for placements, it is recommended that the Council contribution to National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children is capped at 3 children within this scheme. It is noted that this may need to be reviewed as the situation in develops over time.
- 4.3 Local authorities with dedicated resettlement teams administer and support the requests, relocation and resettlement schemes. This provides a faster route to support and protect those most vulnerable.
- 4.4 The Home Office provides a funding package to the local authorities who come forward to support and welcome Afghan refugees. A financial summary of the UKRS and ARMA schemes is in **Appendix 1**.

#### **5. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

- (a) **Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP)) and Moray Integration Joint Board Strategic Plan "Moray Partners in Care 2019 – 2029"**  
Moray Council Corporate Plan 2020-23 outlines its ambitions to support children and families and communities. The new citizens of Moray could contribute to a growing, diverse and sustainable community.

In the interest of safer communities; it is important that community cohesion and integration is a curtail part of the approach to supporting the integration into Morays communities.

**(b) Policy and Legal**

Participation in the resettlement and relocation schemes are voluntary at this time of writing.

The Council has clear powers to assist refugees within Moray. There is no clear powers to assist refugees out with Moray, however section 20 of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 gives the Council powers to promote or improve wellbeing and could justify the support of local charitable activity, if required.

The legal team will assist the Head of Housing and Property to draft head leases for the MOD & RSLs as applicable and for appropriate sub-leases for households.

**(c) Financial implications**

Financial support for the dedicated resettlement team will be allocated through the Home Office financial packages. This is dependent on the number of refugees to financial cover the core costs. Property costs will also be covered by Home Office funding and via welfare benefits as applicable.

There is also the potential for costs associated with providing support for additional support needs and English as a second language within schools depending upon the needs of any school pupils who arrive. The ARAP includes integration support, including education services, so there should be some financial support for any such provision that might need to be considered.

It is noted that that Council will require to underwrite certain costs, including staffing and property in the first instance and that whilst the intention would be for income to recompense this, there may be a net cost to the Council by provision extending beyond the baseline funding arrangements. Under the circumstances it is considered appropriate to proceed without full details of the funding being confirmed and for tolerance of a contingent liability to the Council in order to meet the urgent needs of households under the ARAP scheme.

The temporary resettlement team will be made up of:

Resettlement Coordinator Grade 10 – (£45,805) £59,748

Support Workers x3 – (£23,581) £30,166 (grades subject to confirmation by HR)

A total cost of **£150,246**

The Council makes a small provision for contingencies when the budget is set. The balance on that provision is £50,000. The costs of staffing the team will cost £12,520 per month and that remaining contingency funding would provide the funding for this for a period of four months. In addition there may be property costs, at this stage unknown. These would fall to be funded from reserves if the contingency provision is extinguished.

**(d) Risk Implications and Mitigation**

The scale of this work should not be underestimated. This is resource intensive and is likely to require front load investment to ensure success. The allocation of a project officer to manage and report on the Schemes enables a clear commitment from Moray Council to supporting the refugee programmes.

However, there will be a risk of delay if appropriate staffing resource cannot be allocated for the team, not underestimating the individual pressures within department to prioritise this urgent request to support refugees in Moray.

It is likely that the NTS for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children becomes compulsory, therefore in anticipation of such decision, it is noted that CSWO and Interim Head of Children Services agrees to Moray welcoming up to 3 children as part of the scheme.

**(e) Staffing Implications**

The project will be managed by the Chief Social Work Officer with temporary project manager/officer on loan to assist with the project until a dedicated resettlement team can be established.

**(f) Property**

If agreement is reached with the MOD, otherwise vacant property would be brought back into use. Otherwise a small proportion of social housing allocations would be required to facilitate participation in the scheme.

Relevant lease agreements will be entered into with the MOD and/or RSLs and tenancy rights will be afforded to families allocated accommodation under the schemes.

**(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact**

An EIA has been completed by the Equal Opportunities Officer and is found in **Appendix 2**.

**(h) Consultations**

Chief Executive (Moray Council), Chief Social Work Officer; Chief Financial Officer MIJB; Head of Governance, Strategy and Performance (Moray Council), Head of Housing and Property (Moray Council), Committee Services (Moray Council); Chief Financial Officer (Moray Council), Chief Finance Officer (Moray Council); Interim Head of Children's and Families and Justice Social Work (Moray Council); Equal Opportunity's Officer (Moray Council); Chief Officer MIJB, have been consulted.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

### **6.1 To support the request from the UK Government, seeking local authorities support to participate in the Afghanistan Relocation and Assistance Policy Scheme, to provide housing and other support to those who have been supporting the UK in Afghanistan.**

- 6.2 To commit to welcoming and supporting unaccompanied asylum seeking children to Moray to provide a safe and supportive home.**
- 6.3 The dedicated temporary Resettlement Team should be formed at speed for Moray to be ready and responsive for the coordination, support and continuity of care for those refugees who need a safe and welcoming new home in Moray.**

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Background Papers: With Author

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