

Agenda Item No: 9
Report To: Cabinet
Date of Meeting: 30th January 2020



Report Title: Continuation of Planned Refugee Resettlement Beyond End of Current Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme
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Portfolio Holder Cllr. Bill Barrett
Portfolio Holder for: Housing

Summary:

In October 2015 members approved the planned resettlement of up to 250 of the most vulnerable refugees from Syria in Ashford under the Government's Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) up to 2020.

On June 17th 2019, following the success of the scheme nationally, the Government announced the amalgamation of all current planned refugee resettlement schemes into one scheme to continue beyond 2020. This will be called the Global Resettlement Scheme (GRS).

Ashford has achieved considerable success in supporting refugees into employment and continues to work with partners and potential employers to improve prospects. Around 40% of those available to work have secured paid employment. Nationally the figures reported for employment are 3% and regionally 11%.

This report gives an overview of the VPRS nationally and locally and describes Ashford Borough Council's plans to continue to play its part in the national commitment to planned refugee resettlement under GRS.

Key Decision: YES

Significantly Affected Wards: All

Recommendations: **The Cabinet is recommended to:-**

- I. Note the success of the current VPRS to date.
- II. Extend planned resettlement of refugees in Ashford to offer new lives to up to 50 people (approximately 10 families) each year under GRS subject to availability of suitable private rented property.
- III. To support continuing development of projects and infrastructure to promote and enable successful integration and promote community cohesion to benefit the wider Ashford community.
- IV. To delegate authority to agree the details of the delivery of the scheme beyond 2020 to the Head of Housing in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, with further reports/information being circulated to Members at appropriate points.

Policy Overview:	Living Ashford: quality housing and homes for all
Financial Implications:	None to the Authority. The scheme is fully funded by guaranteed grant funding claimed through the Home Office Resettlement Team.
Legal Implications	None
Equalities Impact Assessment	YES see appendix A to this report
Other Material Implications:	None
Exempt from Publication:	No
Background Papers:	None
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Report Title: Continuation of Planned Refugee Resettlement beyond End of Current Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme

Introduction and Background

1. On 8th October 2015 members approved the planned resettlement of up to 250 of the most vulnerable refugees from Syria in Ashford. This formed part of the Government's Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) up to 2020.
2. The council began preparing for its involvement in this project in September 2015, ahead of its anticipated participation which had to be ratified by Cabinet members. A dedicated council officer was put in place to co-ordinate matters and work with the families and their immediate support networks. As more families have arrived, the team has expanded to include the co-ordinator and additional front line support staff. Consideration is being given to the benefits of employing an Arabic speaking member of the team to further enhance and accelerate the integration process and allow reduction in the current expenditure on interpretation services.
3. The council's excellent rapport with its public and private sector partners ensured that mechanisms were swiftly put in place to ensure timely engagement with statutory services including provision of school places, registration with GPs, access to other healthcare provision including dentists and opticians and access to other community support appropriate for each family.
4. Ashford Borough Council made the decision not use any social housing for arriving families so that there would be no impact on applicants to the Housing Waiting List. This was made possible through A Better Choice for Lettings, the Council's own 'social lettings agency' service and excellent rapport with both private landlords and the voluntary sector across the Borough.
5. The first three families arrived In Ashford in December 2015 at the height of the media's interest in the resettlement scheme. Given the stance taken by Ashford Borough Council, we received a lot of media interest and while the refugees indicated to us that they did not wish to engage in interviews with reporters, the council's marketing and communications team were able to put forward private landlords, volunteers and councillors to talk about how the borough had been preparing for the arrival of the first families.
6. Individuals identified by the United Nations Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) via this scheme for third country resettlement in the UK often present signs of trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety following family separation and other health needs following their time in exile living in extremely difficult circumstances. Fundamentally, the scheme supports the transitional needs of the resettled person and removes barriers to help them access national and local services in order to fully and permanently integrate into UK society. We, along with partner agencies, work to empower individuals to achieve their full potential and meet their responsibilities as members of British society.
7. The most recent arrivals in October 2019 brought the total number of families resettled through Ashford to 34 (146 individuals with a further 13 children having been born since the families arrived).

8. On June 17th 2019, following the success of the scheme nationally, the Government announced the amalgamation of all current national planned refugee resettlement schemes into one scheme to continue beyond 2020. This will be called the Global Resettlement Scheme (GRS). [Immigration: Written Statement HCWS1627 (Commons) and HLWS1589(Lords)]
9. This report gives an overview of the VPRS nationally and locally and describes Ashford Borough Council's plans to continue to play its part in the national commitment to planned refugee resettlement under GRS.

Proposal/Current Position

10. Since December 2015 ABC has welcomed and resettled 34 refugee families under the VPRS equating to 8.5 families per year.
11. In September 2016 ABC identified the need for adults to be able to access additional language and integration training beyond the prescribed 8 hours per week of English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision. In partnership with an Ashford based training company, Concept Training, a programme to support refugees to gain skills needed to access employment opportunities and integrate fully into the community was launched. The programme, Language and Integration Skills Training (LIST) has been recognised nationally as good practice and has been adopted by other local authorities.
12. All children from nursery age to 16 years attend a variety of schools across the Borough. Adults access English classes through Adult Education, college courses or Concept Training according to their abilities and preference.
13. There remains a challenge in securing learning opportunities for refugees aged 16-19 across the whole of Kent. In Ashford we have developed a programme to enable this age group to fast track progress in English, maths and IT skills allowing them to access college courses of their choice as soon as possible after arrival. The situation has improved vastly since September 2017 with the introduction of new courses for this age group at Ashford College. We continue to work with education partners to increase choice and opportunities still further.
14. Ashford has been extremely successful in supporting refugees into employment. More than half the families now have at least one family member in paid employment. Of those refugees currently available for work more than 40% have secured paid employment with the rest undertaking volunteering and work experience. This is much higher than the figures quoted nationally (3%) or regionally (11%). See attached overview and case studies (Appendix B).
15. Ashford's success in providing support for refugees to resettle and rebuild new lives in the borough has been recognised regionally and nationally and good practice acknowledged with various awards.
16. Ashford is approached regularly by other authorities seeking advice on various aspects of resettlement. The project co-ordinator received a British Empire Medal in the 2018 New Year's Honours List. The programme was awarded "Outstanding Achievement in Housing" at the 2018 Kent Housing Group and Kent Joint Policy and Planning Board for Housing Excellence Awards in 2018. Community and arts projects continue to receive positive coverage in the media. Most recently the programme has been shortlisted for a national LGC (Local Government Chronical) Award, results to be announced in March 2020.

17. Under GRS the UK will accept approximately 5000 of the most vulnerable refugees each year. Refugees assessed by United Nations Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as those for whom third country resettlement is the only viable option can be referred by UNHCR to the UK GRS for consideration. Refugees accepted to the UK under GRS will then be allocated by the Home Office Resettlement Team via regional Migration Partnerships to participating local authorities who have accommodation available to meet their needs.
18. As with VPRS, participation in the GRS on the part of local authorities is voluntary. The funding available to local authorities to run GRS is the same as VPRS. Authorities will be able to state the language/origin of refugees they feel best placed to support.
19. Kent has already indicated commitment to continue with resettlement in the other districts and boroughs as has Canterbury City Council (the only other Kent area directly managing their scheme locally).
20. The proposal is for Ashford to continue to welcome vulnerable families under the Government's GRS Scheme from 2020. New homes and futures would be offered to up to 10 households per year subject to suitable properties being available in the private rented sector.

Implications and Risk Assessment

21. Financially, the funding from the Home Office (central government) in support of our work on SVPR means we have experienced no risk in this regard. Since grant funding claimable under GRS is identical to that received under the current VPRS there should be no financial risk for continuation of planned refugee resettlement in the Borough. However, it is important to continue to monitor proposals for any changes to funding or cessation of the GRS due to any change in policy or central government commitment, and adapt the Borough response accordingly.
22. Refugees resettled under GRS can be referred to the scheme by UNHCR from anywhere in the world. However, indications are that the majority (95% +) of refugees referred to the UK in the foreseeable future will originate from Syria and be located somewhere in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. It is important to note that participating LAs can request referral of refugees from cultural backgrounds they are best placed to support. Therefore we are proposing to continue to support families with Syrian origin as we have existing infrastructure in place to best support successful resettlement.
23. Ashford has developed a strong infrastructure and network of support for refugees during delivery of VPRS since 2015. The model is adaptable to provide support for any vulnerable group arriving or already resident in the Borough in the future.

Equalities Impact Assessment

24. Members are referred to the attached Assessment.

Consultation Planned or Undertaken

25. ABC continues to work closely with the Home Office, South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM), Kent County Council (for education and social care), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the NHS to ensure timely provision of services for arriving refugees.

26. In addition to statutory services ABC continues to work closely with third sector, voluntary, faith and community groups to enable effective community involvement and promote integration of arriving refugees into their new communities.

Other Options Considered

27. To end planned refugee resettlement in Ashford under VPRS when it ends in 2020 and wind down existing support to end in 2024.

Reasons for Supporting Option Recommended

28. Ashford has proven to be innovative and forward thinking in developing a programme to support effective resettlement and integration of refugees in the community. Running the programme has brought resources to the Borough which it would not otherwise be able to access.
29. Ashford has developed a strong infrastructure and network of support for refugees, which supports broader community cohesion objectives and community involvement and participation. The model is adaptable to provide support for any vulnerable group arriving or already resident in the Borough in the future.

Conclusion

30. Ashford remains well placed to continue to provide an important role in the resettlement of some of the most vulnerable refugees into new communities. There is a desire to continue planned refugee resettlement in Ashford under the Government's extension of VPRS into the GRS from 2020 and offer new homes for up to 10 families per year subject to availability of suitable properties in the private rented sector.

Portfolio Holder's Views

31. I am pleased to support the continuation of planned refugee resettlement in the Borough, building on the huge amount of experience and expertise developed within the Authority since 2015.
32. I acknowledge the enormous difference we are making to the lives of some of those most affected by the global refugee crisis. It is important that we continue this good work and I fully support our continuing efforts to provide this level of assistance, welcoming vulnerable families into our communities.
33. I thank all those private landlords who have already helped, and would also like to encourage others to offer suitable properties they may have in support of this project.
34. The continuing support from the residents of Ashford, third sector and voluntary organisations and community and faith groups continues to be key to enabling successful integration. The response has been humbling and heart-warming and I am confident that these strong community bonds will continue to develop.

Contact and Email

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Impact Assessment

When is an assessment needed?

Councils must assess the impact of **proposed policies or practices** while they are being developed, with analysis available for members before a decision is made (i.e. at Cabinet).

Broadly, *policies and practices* can be understood to embrace a full range of different activities, such as Cabinet decisions which substantially change the way in which we do something, setting budgets, developing high-level strategies, and organisational practices such as internal restructuring. Assessments should especially be undertaken if the activity relates closely to an equalities group (see next page).

Importantly, this does not include reports that are 'for note' or do not propose substantial changes – assessments should only be considered when we propose to do something differently.

Assessments should also be carried out when conducting a large-scale review of **existing policies or practices** to check that they remain non-discriminatory. This does not mean filling out an assessment on every report on a subject – it is up to you to decide if the report's scope or scale warrants an assessment.

1. General Information	
1.1 Name of project, policy, procedure, practice or issue being assessed	Continuation of Planned Refugee Resettlement Beyond End of Current Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme
1.2 Service / Department	Housing
1.3 Head of Service	Sharon Williams
1.4 Assessment Lead Officer	Anne Forbes
1.5 Date of Assessment	30 th December 2019
1.6 Is this assessment of an existing or a proposed project, policy, procedure, practice or issue?	Existing policy and practice

2. What is Being Assessed?	
2.1 What are the aims of this project, policy, procedure, practice or issue?	To support the resettlement of vulnerable refugees into the community
2.2 Who is intended to benefit from this project, policy, procedure, practice or issue?	Refugees coming to the Borough under UK Government resettlement schemes and supporting wider community cohesion.
2.3 Who else is involved in the provision of this project, policy, procedure, practice or issue? i.e. other sections, public or private bodies	
- within Ashford BC	Refugee Resettlement Team - Housing
- from other agencies	Home Office – funding and national policy and practice development and dissemination. South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM) – regional coordination, sharing of good practice locally, regionally and nationally, personnel education and training, refugee participation. Kent County Council (access to Education and Social Care) Education and training providers (Adult Ed, Colleges, Concept Training) CCG and Local Health Trusts (access to healthcare) Private sector landlords NGOs (AVC) Community and Faith Groups

3. Possible Sources of Information

In order to assess the impact of proposed decision it is important to bring together all information you have on it to, analyse them and come to conclusions on how it affects those with protected characteristics.

Information on a policy, project or procedure can come in many forms :-

- Census and other demographic information
- User satisfaction and other surveys
- Previous consultation exercises
- Performance Indicators
- Eligibility Criteria
- Service uptake data
- Complaints
- Customer Profiling
- MOSAIC data

In order to come to conclusions on impacts in section 4 you **must** have taken in to account all appropriate information, and be able to provide this if necessary in support of the judgements you make.

Also, it is not enough to have broad information on service users – to meet equalities duties this information **must** be broken down – where applicable – into the relevant protected characteristics which may be affected by this decision. For example, when considering disabled access to a new community facility, overall usage figures are not enough – an understanding of how many disabled users within this total must be demonstrated.

The protected characteristics are :-

Age Disability Gender reassignment Marriage and
civil partnership Pregnancy and maternity

Race Religion and belief Sex Sexual orientation

More information on the definitions of these characteristics can be found here - <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/new-equality-act-guidance/protected-characteristics-definitions/>

4. What judgements can we make?				
4.1 Does the evidence already available indicate that the project, policy, procedure, practice or issue may affect these groups differently? (please check the relevant box and provide evidence where possible)	Positive Impact?	Negative Impact?	No Differential Impact	If yes, can it be justified (and how)?

Impact Factors:				
Age (please detail any specific groups considered)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Age range of those currently supported is from birth to 66
Disability (please detail any specific groups considered)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Gender (please detail any specific groups considered)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Gender Reassignment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Marriage / Civil Partnership	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Pregnancy & Maternity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Race (please detail any specific groups considered)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Thus far all people helped have been Syrian nationals. All have identified themselves as Muslim (practicing or non-practicing) with the exception of one multi-faith family.
Religion / Belief	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	See above
Sexual Orientation (please detail any specific groups considered)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

5. Conclusions	
5.1 Does the decision maximise opportunities to promote equality and good inter-group relations? If "yes" please state how?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes – a key part of the programme has been to help integrate these refugees into their new communities <input type="checkbox"/> No
5.2 Based on the answers to the above can we confidently say that in its present form the decision treats different groups <u>fairly</u> (bearing in mind "fairly" may mean differently) and that no further amendment is required?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes – although getting more support than other non-refugee groups this reflects the desperate situations they are fleeing. <input type="checkbox"/> No
If further action is identified to ensure fair impacts please complete the Action Plan available on the intranet and attach it to this form	

6. Monitoring and Review	
How will monitoring of this policy, procedure or practice be reported (where appropriate)?	Regular reports to Cabinet and on-going monitoring of central government policy and funding in support of the GRS.
When is it proposed to next review the project, policy, procedure, practice or issue?	December 2020

Appendix B

Employment Overview and Case Study

When the first families arrived in Ashford in December 2015 and January 2016 it became immediately apparent that the biggest barrier to employment would be their lack of English. The requirement under the Home Office Funding Instructions and Guidance at that time was to ensure availability of 4 hours of English learning per week (this was revised in 2017 to 8 hours per week) for working age refugees. The feedback from the arriving refugees was that this was not enough. When, in April 2016, a family arrived who already spoke English and the head of household secured employment within two weeks of arrival this had a devastating effect on the mental wellbeing of those who had arrived previously. They felt that they were failing and started to lose hope of ever finding employment.

As a result Ashford committed to accelerating the process of English learning and include language specific to the requirements of the workplace. Working with Concept Training (an Ashford based training provider) the LIST (Language and Integration Skills Training) Programme started to be developed and delivery began in September 2016. Very quickly individuals started to undertake work experience and take up volunteering opportunities. They were able to build their CVs and have realistic prospects of gaining paid employment whilst continuing English learning and updating skills or gaining new qualifications. The flexibility of the LIST programme to cater for individual learning needs has been key as has the delivery of learning opportunities to fit in with paid employment, work experience and volunteering. Working alongside Ashford Volunteer Centre, the ABC Resettlement Team and Concept Training we are working to maximise opportunities for people to gain experience and language skills allowing them to transition into paid employment as soon as possible.

Paid employment secured to date includes bespoke wheel chroming and painting, book keeping, barbering, plumbing, catering, driving, working in the retail industry, factory work and agricultural and horticultural work.

Volunteering jobs vary from working in charity shops and at the food bank to working with Kent Wildlife Trust and other voluntary organisations. Work experience opportunities have been secured in a variety of sectors.

Case Study

Ahmad arrived in the UK in January 2016 with his family aged 18. He spoke very little English beyond basic greetings. He attended English classes through Adult Education but found it difficult being in a class of older adults and was impatient to learn more quickly. He attended the Prince's Trust "Team" course for young people and progressed within 12 weeks to being able to deliver a presentation, along with his "Team" mates, describing their experiences. Ahmad then attended college to further improve his English and other skills. He returned to the Prince's Trust to mentor other refugees accessing "Team" as well as volunteering at Sk8side Youth Club and finding part time work to help support his family. He is currently working part time while taking a Level 3 course in Public Services Interpreting which he will complete next month.