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| Agenda Item | 5 |
| Report No | HCW/02/20 |

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Date: 12 February 2020

Report Title: Refugee Resettlement Programme

Report By: Acting Head of Policy

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report summarises the Highland's response to the Syrian Refugee crisis since 2015, setting out the challenges and successes in resettling Syrian families in Highland. Views on involvement in the next programme for 2020 – 2025 are also set out.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. welcome the significant efforts by communities and partners which has delivered a successful Refugee Resettlement programme in Highland;
- ii. acknowledge the unreserved support from all Highland Council services and partners to continue to be involved in future phases;
- iii. agree to welcome around 25 further refugees to Highland in 2020/21 under the new Global Refugee Resettlement Programme with a further recommendation to come forward when more information is known about the future programme.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource – the Resettlement Programme has been funded by the UK Government and with careful management this has proven adequate. With the same funding anticipated for the first year of the 2020-25 programme it is not anticipated that there will be any financial pressures arising from it in year one. Staff impact across Highland Council (as

well as for partner organisations and volunteers) is likely to increase due to the nature of the work but this will be managed and balanced with competing workloads

3.2 Legal – no implications

3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island) – there are only positive implications from this Scheme, with particularly vulnerable families being able to settle in Highland. There are further positive impacts from increased health and welfare and wider community benefit from new residents and cultures within a community.

3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever – no implications

3.5 Risk – no implications

3.6 Gaelic – no implications

4. Background

4.1 Highland Council has been working with partners since 2015 in preparation for Syrian families coming to Highland. A Refugee Resettlement Strategic Group (RRSG) was established in 2015 and includes officers from the Highland Council, NHS Highland, Police Scotland, DWP, Highlife Highland and the Highland Third Sector Interface, ensuring excellent cross-sectoral working across the Highland public and third sectors.

4.2 The Council's initial commitment was to receive up to 100 people (25-30 families) during the five year resettlement period 2015-2020. In order to ensure the best outcome for Syrian families, area specific delivery groups were established for each phase to ensure all arrangements were put in place prior to arrival. These Delivery Groups continue to meet for as long a period as necessary (the delivery group for phase 1 still meets to resolve any issues if they arise).

In December 2016 the Council appointed a Refugee Resettlement Officer reinforcing the Council's commitment.

4.3 Phase details as follows:

Phase 1 – Alness - six families welcomed between May and August 2016.

Phase 2 – Kinlochleven - four families were welcomed in March 2017. All have subsequently relocated due to lack of easily accessible religious and cultural support. This was compounded by difficulties in delivering all the required services e.g. childcare, English classes and interpretation services.

Phase 3 – Dingwall - seven families welcomed in early 2018.

Phase 4 – Inverness – six families arrived in autumn 2019. While pressure on housing stock is significant, this is the first time families have been placed in an area where housing pressure is particularly acute. This was eased by working with a housing partner (Cairn Housing Association)

5. Current Situation

- 5.1 In total 23 families have been resettled in Highland, falling slightly short of the commitment to accept 25-30 families in the 2015 – 2020 period. The Resettlement Group considers it appropriate that for the remainder of this programme that Highland will only accept linked-family requests (as and when cases present themselves) – noting that the process can then take up to a further two years.
- 5.2 This decision also was set against the background of information received recently which sets out the UK Government approach to future phases. Although there is not much detail at the present time it appears that the current resettlement programmes will be consolidated into one global resettlement programme for vulnerable refugees from an expanded geographic area. It will also include the resettlement to the UK of 5,000 individuals during 2020. The 5-years' funding package provided by the Home Office will continue to be provided to support the programme.
- 5.3 In 2015, the following commitments were given, indicating numbers of individuals being resettled –
- 20,000 - UK Government commitment for **2015-2020**
 - 2,000 - Scottish Government commitment ie 10%
 - 100 - HC commitment – 5% of Scottish Government

If the same percentage allocation is applied to the 2020 commitment, the following would apply:

- 5,000 - UK Government commitment **in year one**
- 500 - Scottish Government commitment i.e. 10%
- 25 - HC commitment – 5% of Scottish Government

At time of writing, there is no further information available for the period beyond 2020 but it is recommended that commitments are reviewed once these are known.

6. Programme Delivery

- 6.1 This has been a highly successful, if challenging, resettlement programme in that Highland communities have welcomed families who have endured the most horrific circumstances and ensured they are settled, safe, well and wanted in their new surroundings. Third sector organisations with support from many individuals have arranged welcome parties, provided the most appropriate clothing and food, helped with transport, social integration and generally been there as huge support. Businesses have employed a number of refugees, and some have moved on to further and higher education and all are learning English. Young people in schools have been outstanding ambassadors for the programme, leading the way in welcoming their new friends to their communities and helping them to integrate.
- 6.2 However, there have been significant challenges in delivering the resettlement programme within Highland most of which have been caused by rurality and lack of locally based services. As follows:

- a) **Finance** – funding is provided to the receiving local authority via the Home Office and is based on a set formula which is calculated on the number of adults and children in a family. School aged children are allocated additional funding to help meet their education requirements. Further funding can be made available if adaptations are required to houses, if houses are being held void for a period in excess of 12 weeks (and good cause can be demonstrated) and for childcare provision to help meet the language class requirements, although this funding does not always meet the full costs. It is subsidised by the overall Home Office funding.

For most phases, the funding has been adequate, but this has required careful management particularly due to service delivery to rural locations. A relatively small amount of funding is also made available to the NHS which they apply for separately.

- b) **availability of housing stock** – there is a huge demand for affordable social housing across Highland and this is particularly acute in the Inner Moray Firth. Initial phases saw families resettled in Aness and Kinlochleven with the third phase settled in Dingwall. Those placed furthest from Inverness had concerns about accessing essential services for their needs, e.g. ambulance response times, distance from Raigmore. Currently the requirement from the Home Office for housing is 2 bedroomed properties for more complex health cases or larger properties (3 beds+) to accommodate larger families.
- c) **housing support** – provided by an external supplier, housing support workers are crucial to such vulnerable families settling in the area and coming to terms with many aspects of their new lives. Housing support availability is retendered for each phase and again location plays a large part in terms of availability of support workers and cost of provision.
- d) **interpretation** – provision of interpreters has largely been through the Council's existing contract for face-to-face interpretation delivered by Global Language Services Ltd with some additional provision by telephone interpretation. It has been difficult to provide a consistent supply of interpreters who are willing to travel outwith the Inner Moray Firth area. There is a heavy dependency on interpretation particularly over the first 6 months while all the 'formal' processes are being progressed e.g. sign up for Universal Credit, patient interviews with GPs etc. Interpretation has been a significant cost to the budget. It may therefore be more cost effective in future phases to employ an interpreter directly.
- e) **education** – both secondary and primary schools have received children from the resettled families. The children have largely settled well, due to the very constructive approach of Head and class teachers as well as the welcoming attitude of class-mates. The co-ordinated efforts of education psychologists in linking families with local projects has been very helpful. Young people in Highland have demonstrated a strong willingness to

welcome those from areas of conflict and have been excellent role-models.

- f) **ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages)** – similarly, provision of ESOL classes has been challenging due to difficulties in providing tutors in the relevant location, small numbers of participants with varying language and literacy skills, lack of available childcare. ESOL is also a significant pressure on the budget. Resettled families are entitled to 8 hours per week language support and are required to commit to attending ESOL classes in order to drawdown any benefits, therefore classes must be made available to them.
- g) **Social** – the Third Sector has a crucial role to play in mobilising volunteer effort to help furnish houses in addition to the standard pack provided by the Council. Third sector volunteers also provide orientation, introductions to the community, transport etc. A suite of information is provided to each family on arrival which provides area specific information, contacts etc. This support from the third sector has resulted in minimal intervention by Children’s Services.
- h) **Phase 4 - Inverness** – 6 families were resettled in Inverness in Autumn 2019. This is a particularly high-pressured housing area and it has been facilitated to an extent by partnering with Cairn Housing Association. Due to the small size of the units (mainly 2-bed), this reduces the size of families which can be accommodated which in turn reduces the grant received. Therefore although local service delivery costs are lower due to being located within the City, the budget pressure is unlikely to reduce.
- i) **Resources** – the complexity of the project and the needs of the individual families requires a significant resource to oversee all of the phases. With the limited resources available within Highland to support the project, there is concern of ‘burnout’ amongst key staff across a number of organisations involved. Well-being sessions have been identified as a positive support mechanism to manage this, however the sheer volume of work associated with the project indicates a requirement to review the resources required to deliver the Council’s commitment.

7. Future Resettlement Phase

- 7.1 It has been confirmed by the UK Government that there will be a new Refugee Resettlement Programme running from 2020 – 2025. In order to fully assess the ability of the Council and partners to resource a further Scheme, consultation has been carried out both internally and externally to the Council.

Responses from all partners have been universally supportive of Highland hosting more families. However, most respondents identified challenges for their organisations, summarised as follows:

- a) a recognition that it is difficult to identify available housing stock in areas of high housing need which is particularly acute in the Inner Moray Firth area
- b) a recognition that it is particularly challenging to deliver services in more rural areas due to distance from providers plus cultural and social contacts
- c) that to identify suitable housing may require partnership with other providers of social housing and potentially private sector. The latter has been tried in the past but response was geographically scattered and expensive
- d) the intense, pressured work can cause stress on all services working closely with the resettled families – a six to eight week lead-in time for arrivals puts a significant strain on teams to deliver the full support package in time
- e) difficulties in sourcing interpreters is a particular challenge, with high demands being placed on them. While 'Language Line' (telephone-based interpretation) can be a useful resource, at times there is a real requirement for face to face interpretation particularly in the early weeks / months post-arrival and for critical appointments eg medical, DWP etc. or when meeting cultural requirements.
- f) there is substantial bureaucracy around reporting requirements to the Council, COSLA, Scottish Government and Home Office which is difficult to accommodate within the role of the Resettlement Officer due to time pressures. This pressure will continue to increase as the Council is required to meet the key objectives of the Scottish Government's 'New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2018-2022'.
- g) In terms of health service provision, pressures can be caused to GP practices, particularly around interpretation. In considering location of future phases, the availability of primary care services should be considered as should the availability of mental health support services.
- h) Delivery of ESOL classes outwith the Inner Moray Firth area again has proved difficult. However good joint working between partners is hopefully easing this pressure and improving capacity.
- i) Employability is an additional area which requires intense resourcing to support family members to enter the world of work.

7.2 It should be noted that a key difference in the new Scheme is that it will be a Global Resettlement Scheme, resulting from the consolidation of a number of Refugee Resettlement Programmes. This may mean more difficulties in terms of interpretation but there is not enough detail known about the new programme as yet in terms of countries of origin etc

8. Finance

- 8.1 To date, the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme provides funding for the full costs of resettlement in the first year, including the cost of providing additional support required. The scheme is funded jointly by the Home Office and the Department for International Development. Local Authorities also receive funding for years 2 – 5 following resettlement, with per capita funding reducing year on year as families become more self-sufficient. All additional support services for refugees are funded by the UK Government and do not draw on The Highland Council's budgets.
- 8.2 It has been indicated that these funding arrangements will continue for the new Global programme.
- 8.3 The funding for the refugees is based on 12 month periods from their date of arrival and not the financial year, so any surplus or deficit of funding is carried forward at the financial year end resulting in a nil outturn for the Council shown in the summary below. Over the period, a small surplus of funding has been generated but it is anticipated that much of this may be required when the five year 'leave to remain' process begins

Financial summary as follows:

| | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 |
|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| | £ | £ | £ |
| Income | 217,314 | 453,273 | 455,279 |
| Expenditure | 292,573 | 249,946 | 309,026 |
| Surplus (Deficit) carried forward* | (75,260) | 203,327 | 146,253 |
| Total year end outturn for The Highland Council | 0 | 0 | 0 |

*some of the deficit and surplus figures relate to timing of the funding

Designation: Acting Head of Policy

Date: 20 January 2020

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Background Papers: