
Report To:	Policy and Resources Committee	Date:	12th August 2014
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Subject:	Afghan and Syrian Resettlement Schemes		

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide information to Committee on a request from the Home Office, via COSLA, for local authorities to provide accommodation and support to the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) scheme and the Afghan Resettlement Scheme

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 The UK Government has stated its intention to relocate to the UK some of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees, displaced to neighbouring countries by the ongoing conflict. The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme will run in parallel with the UNHCR's Syria Humanitarian Admission Programme (HAP) and will prioritise help for survivors of torture and violence, women and children at risk and those in need of medical care.
- 2.2 In addition, following an announcement by the Secretary of State for Defence, the National Security Council has agreed a package of measures to offer locally engaged Afghan staff who worked as interpreters and translators, and will be made redundant as a result of the withdrawal of UK forces, the option to relocate to the UK.
- 2.3 Cosla has been in discussion with the Home Office and local authorities to ascertain interest from any Scottish local authorities to participate in these resettlement programmes.
- 2.4 Officers from within the CHCP have carried out a scoping exercise to ascertain whether conditions and services within Inverclyde would be able to support any Syrian or Afghan nationals, relocating to the UK, settling in the area.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that Committee note the content of this report and give consideration to the request for support from the UK Government in a way, and at a level, that balances the services provided for the Syrian and Afghan nationals and their families against existing local pressures for accommodation and Council services.
- 3.2 It is recommended that Inverclyde Council advise the Home Office and Cosla of their intention, that having completed initial scoping work, it be agreed in principle to participation in the Afghan Resettlement Scheme, but not the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation scheme, subject to more detailed work being completed on support requirements.

4.0 BACKGROUND

Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) scheme

- 4.1 The UN estimates that 9.3 million people are in dire need of humanitarian aid within Syria. At least 6.5 million people in Syria have been forced to flee their homes and there are almost 2.4 million refugees in neighbouring countries. On 29 January, the Home Secretary made a statement to Parliament outlining the Government's intention to relocate to the UK some of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees, displaced to neighbouring countries by the ongoing conflict. The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme will run in parallel with the UNHCR's Syria Humanitarian Admission Programme (HAP).
- 4.2 The VPR scheme will prioritise help for survivors of torture and violence, women and children at risk, and those in need of medical care.
- 4.3 The scheme is based on need rather than being designed to meet a quota. However, it is predicted that it will support several hundred people across the UK over the next three years.
- 4.4 Individuals identified by UNHCR will be allowed to bring their immediate family with them. This will be limited to one spouse / partner (who must be over 18) and their minor dependant children (under 18 and not living an independent life). There will be no provision to allow applicants to bring over-age dependant relatives unless they also meet the vulnerability criteria in their own right or the Home Office is satisfied that there is an existing dependency.
- 4.5 Local authorities who choose to participate in this scheme require to take the lead in working with other key local partners to ensure that arrivals are provided with suitable accommodation and the specific needs of these extremely vulnerable individuals are met. Consideration will also need to be given to bringing in specialist support providers subject to individuals' specific requirements.
- 4.6 Medical reports will be produced by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in advance of arrival. An assessment tool is being developed to aid local authorities and partners to review the medical reports and other information and identify whether suitable support services exist locally. Following this assessment, local authorities will confirm with the Home Office whether or not they are able to accept specific cases.
- 4.7 It is envisaged that as this scheme will be supporting vulnerable persons, the support needs required will be extremely complex and potentially be ongoing for a considerable time period.
- 4.8 To date three local authorities have noted interest in this scheme and are progressing plans with Cosla and the Home Office. These are Glasgow, Edinburgh and Renfrewshire.

Afghan Resettlement Scheme

- 4.9 Following an announcement by the Secretary of State for Defence, the National Security Council has agreed a package of measures to offer locally engaged Afghan staff who will be made redundant as a result of the withdrawal of UK forces, the option to relocate to the UK. This will be offered to those who have put themselves in most danger whilst serving Her Majesty's Government (HMG). Staff must have been working in roles, such as interpreters and translators, which regularly took them outside the wire on the frontline in Helmand Province. Seriously injured staff will also be offered relocation where they would have qualified had their employment not been terminated due to injuries sustained in combat. The relocation offer is provided in recognition of service and not on any future risk to staff because of their association with British Forces.
- 4.10 The actual numbers eligible for the relocation offer are still being finalised. Original estimates suggest that 600 main applicants will qualify and 220 have already indicated their desire to relocate. Staff will only be eligible once they have been given notice of their redundancy and this process has already begun. The first arrivals in the UK will be in July 2014 and thereafter spread throughout 2014 and into 2015. There will be a lag between being made redundant and actual arrival in the UK to allow time for immigration checks and visa processing to be completed and to

ensure there is sufficient time to put adequate reception arrangements in place.

- 4.11 Those eligible for relocation will also be allowed to bring their immediate family with them. This will be limited to one spouse/partner, who must be over 18, and their dependent children, who must be under 18 and not living independently. There is no provision to allow applicants to bring over-age dependent relatives. It had been estimated that families will comprise between 4-6 people, inclusive of the applicant. However, an analysis of the initial 220 applicants shows that 45% are single males, 28% are childless couples, 12% are families of 3 and the remaining 15% are families of 4 and above. These percentages may change as more people choose to relocate.
- 4.12 The majority of those who will qualify for relocation will have been employed as interpreters, so it can be expected that they will have some degree of English language skills. However, the level of English language skills may vary considerably and some may have limited abilities in written English. It is not expected that other family members will have English language skills.
- 4.13 The Government expects that those who relocate will have a desire to find employment once they arrive in the UK. To be eligible for relocation the applicant must have demonstrated a degree of bravery (regularly working on the frontline) and loyalty (at least 12 months service) in their past employment with HMG. This is considered to be a good indicator of future employability and the overall desire to work. However, it is recognised that there may, initially, be a gap between the desire to work and actually finding work. Assistance to find work will be necessary.
- 4.14 Training on the reality of life in the UK will be provided prior to leaving Afghanistan and arriving in the UK. Additional training options are being looked at and may include training for employment however to date this has not yet been identified.
- 4.15 A paper-based medical screening will take place prior to arrival in the UK providing information on medical needs. There will, however, be a group that will qualify for relocation on account of injuries sustained and which prevented them from continuing to work on the frontline. This group will have heightened medical needs and will require closer management prior to arrival in the UK to ensure adequate reception arrangements are in place to cater for their needs. Current information suggests that there will be fewer than 10 of these cases.
- 4.16 All applicants, including accompanying family members, will be subject to the usual immigration checks and vetting prior to a visa being granted. Those with a criminal past or links to war crimes or extremism will be excluded from the scheme.
- 4.17 Those meeting the eligibility and immigration requirements will be granted leave to enter the UK for 5 years. After 5 years, applicants will be able to apply for permanent settlement. Permanent settlement will be refused if the person's character or conduct do not meet a satisfactory level. Leave can be curtailed if the person poses a danger to the public, or to national security, during the initial 5 year period.
- 4.18 To date four Scottish Local Authorities have noted interest in this scheme and are progressing plans with Cosla and the Home Office. These are Glasgow; Fife; North Ayrshire and South Ayrshire. Glasgow City expects to take their first cohort in July 2014.

5.0 LOCAL CONSIDERATIONS

Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) scheme

- 5.1 Discussion has taken place with Cosla and also colleagues in Glasgow City Council who have a wealth of experience in participating in a range of similar schemes and have suggested that the Syrian scheme will potentially be complex and challenging due to the nature of the issues the refugees will present with, as they are survivors of torture and violence, women and children at risk, and those in need of medical care.
- 5.2 Discussions with NHSGGC have also raised concerns regarding the complex requirements, the potential requirement for specialist services and ongoing support.

- 5.3 Due to the initial conversations highlighting the complex support environment which would be required, and Inverclyde's lack of previous experience in such schemes, further scoping has not been carried out at this time on the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) scheme.

Afghan Resettlement Scheme

5.4 Integration Support

Local authorities participating in the scheme will take the lead in determining how the new arrivals will be integrated into their community. It will be for individual councils to put in place the mechanisms needed to integrate new arrivals. There would be a requirement for Inverclyde Council to ensure suitable staff resource is in place to support and coordinate the Afghans arrival and resettlement.

This will include:

- Reception arrangements for clients and, where appropriate their dependants, at the airport, including handover from flight escorts and welcome briefing.
- A package of advice and assistance to cover employment, welfare benefits, housing, health, education and utility supply. Specifically, this package should ensure that new arrivals are registered with GPs, registered with their local Job Centre Plus, receive a National Insurance Number and assistance to secure school places for school aged children.
- Orientations to the local area.

5.5 Numbers

Local authorities participating in the scheme have been asked by the Home Office to indicate how many individuals/families they would be willing to accommodate. The agreements made with local authorities will stipulate how many individuals they will take and over what period. There is no minimum on how many individuals a local authority can decide to accommodate.

The Home Office will work with local authorities to agree a process of how referrals will be made. The assumption is that local authorities will be given a minimum of 4 weeks' notice of new arrivals and longer for any cases with complex care needs.

Local discussions and intelligence from other experience from other local authorities have suggested Inverclyde may wish to take 8-12 families.

5.6 Housing

It is expected that participating local authorities would secure and provide furnished accommodation. The accommodation will be in accordance with Local Authority housing standards and should be modestly furnished and adequate for the needs of the individuals and families for the first three months. Councils would want to consider what happens after the first three months. Under a similar scheme for Iraqi staff, local authorities secured or provided a longer tenancy than central government provided funding for. This enabled new arrivals to stay in the same accommodation, but to pay rent after the first three months using housing benefit, where necessary. This worked well in the local authorities that participated in the Iraqi scheme and helped prevent this group relying on homelessness assistance after the first three months. However, it will be down to local authorities to determine how they accommodate new arrivals, but if they need to vacate the property after three months consideration will have to be given to the support that they may need to find new accommodation. Consideration may be given for central government funding to cover a short period of void costs associated with holding a property in anticipation of receiving a new arrival.

Discussion has taken place with the RSLs, with River Clyde Homes and Oak Tree Housing Association stating an interest and availability of housing within the area.

5.7 Financial Assistance

Local authorities will need to determine how to provide individuals with financial support in the initial 3 months in lieu of benefits i.e. through cash payments or bank transfers. The rate of financial assistance will be determined by the Government in order to ensure consistency across different local authorities. These payments will be equivalent to Job Seekers Allowance rates for adults, and asylum support rates for children. Central Government funding will cover the cost of the financial assistance provided.

Grand Central Savings situated within Greenock Town centre could be utilised for initial payments and support individuals with ongoing bank account requirements.

5.8 Education

Dependent on the individuals/couples/families Inverclyde chooses to host there may be a need to accommodate preschool and school aged children within the early years and school establishment. It is unlikely that children will have English as a language therefore there will be a requirement for interpreting services, however the fathers will all have a degree of English as they worked as interpreters for the British Forces. Consideration will require to be given to numbers of children, capacity of schools and also whether all children would be best accommodated within one school dependent on location of housing.

5.9 Access to Health Services

In terms of access to health services, individuals will have full rights to accessing mainstream NHS services and will be supported on arrival to register with a local GP and Dentist. Inverclyde can advise the Home Office that it does not wish to accommodate any individuals with complex needs or adapted housing requirements due to injury. Discussions have taken place with the CHCP Clinical Director who does not envisage any specific issues from an NHS perspective.

5.10 Safety

Inverclyde has a very small ethnic minority population and concerns have been raised regarding the acceptance and safety of these individuals within communities in Inverclyde. In addition as these individuals have worked for the British Government there is a potential risk from opposing forces. Discussions with Police Scotland have confirmed they have been briefed nationally on this scheme and it is not considered to be a security risk.

From a local perspective consideration would require to be given to a positive media campaign to welcome these individuals to Inverclyde to help with community relationships.

5.11 Employment

As the majority of those who will qualify for relocation will have been employed as interpreters it is expected that they will have some degree of English language skills. It is therefore hoped that with this, and the fact that they have previously worked for the British Forces, they will have an overall desire to work and find suitable employment. Individual training requirements would require to be determined and support provided by local employability providers to help identify suitable employment options following the initial three months settlement period.

5.12 Religion

In terms of religion we are led to believe from the Home Office that all individuals will be Muslim and will speak Pashto but many will also speak Farsi.

There is one prayer room sited in Greenock with access to larger facilities in both Renfrew and Glasgow and an established Afghan community in Glasgow.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

Finance

- 6.1 Central Government, via a Home Office grant agreement with the local authority, will provide funding to cover the cost of providing accommodation and financial support for the first three months as outlined below. After this those being accommodated will be able to access mainstream benefits. Funding will also be available to cover the cost of providing integration support.

The intention is to pay the integration support funding upfront as a one-off supplement per person. It is recognised that individuals' integration needs will differ and some may need support for longer than three months. The integration supplement should be sufficient to cover on-going support, but the expectation is for local authorities to provide an intense three month period of integration support to ensure new arrivals have access to benefits advice and services during this initial period.

Accommodation					
Set-up and void costs (lump-sum)	Per person rate for families		Per person rate for couples		Per person rate for singles
	£1250		£1425		£2850
Rent (up to 4 months)	£15 per person, per day				
1 night hotel accommodation (if needed, dependant on time of arrival)	£50 per person				
Baby pack comprising cot, high chair etc	£225 per any child under two years of age				
Integration					
To provide integration support (lump-sum)	Per person rate for families		Per person rate for couples		Per person rate for singles
	£4500		£6000		£7500
Cash support					
Weekly cash support rates (up to 4 months)	Single (under 25)	Single (25 or over)	Couples	Child (under 16)	Child (at least 16, but under 18)
	£56.80	£71.70	£112.55	£52.96	£39.80
Transport					
Transfer from airport to accommodation	£40 per person				

Legal

- 6.2 There are no current legal issues arising from the approval of this report.

Human Resources

- 6.3 There are no current human resources issues arising from the approval of this report as it is expected that the service will be provided from within existing resources or through additional financial support provided for the purpose by Central Government.

Equalities

- 6.4 This report has not been assessed for equalities impacts. However, should the Council agree to accommodate families and individuals, equalities considerations will be considered before doing so.

Repopulation

- 6.5 Agreeing to accommodate and support the Afghans relocating to the UK in Inverclyde will assist in

the longer term goal of repopulating the area and potentially lead to other migrants coming to live in the area.

7.0 CONSULTATIONS

- 7.1 Discussions have taken place with Council Services and key partners to date to ascertain interest and challenges which may be encountered if Inverclyde participates in this scheme.

8.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 Initial scoping has allowed for some of the challenges and advantages to Inverclyde participating in these schemes to be discussed. Overall there appears to be a willingness to be involved in the Afghan Resettlement Scheme and that Inverclyde would benefit from the addition of a more ethnically migrant population.