

Refugee Resettlement

Summary and Recommendations

Scottish Councils have played a pivotal role in the resettlement of refugees through the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme, and associated schemes for unaccompanied young people. UK Government has recently announced the extension of their commitment to resettlement beyond the end of current schemes in 2020 and will be seeking support from Local Authorities across the UK in order to fulfil their commitment. In addition, work is ongoing to improve the National Transfer Scheme for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and COSLA is seeking to provide input from Scottish Councils in order that the scheme is fit for purpose going forward.

Leaders are invited to:

- i. Reaffirm Scottish Councils' commitment to supporting the resettlement of refugees to the UK; and
- ii. Agree that COSLA continues to engage with the Home Office in order that the National Transfer Scheme for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children meets the needs of both the children and young people concerned, and the Local Authorities that support them.

References

- January 2018, Leaders, Item 3 – Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children – National Transfer Scheme
- September 2017, Community Wellbeing Board, Item 9 - Refugee Resettlement
- February 2017, Leaders, Item 12 – Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children Update
- November 2016, Leaders, Item 13 – Calais Crisis Update and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children
- August 2016, Leaders, Item 5 – Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children
- May 2016, Leaders, Item 1a – Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children
- May 2016, Leaders, Item 2 - Accommodating Refugees and Asylum Seekers - Update
- November 2015, Leaders, Item 14 - The Refugee Crisis and Resettlement Programme
- September 2015, Leaders, item 3b - The Refugee Crisis and Resettlement Programme

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Purpose

1. This paper seeks agreement from Leaders that Scottish Councils will continue to support the resettlement of refugees to the UK through the recently announced scheme that will replace current schemes in 2020. The paper also provides an update on associated work by Local Authorities to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and asks for Leaders' endorsement of work to seek improvements to the current National Transfer Scheme for UASC.

Current COSLA Position

2. Since 2015, Scottish Councils have played a leading role in the resettlement of refugees to the UK. All 32 councils in Scotland are actively participating and, to date, over 3,000 refugees have been resettled under the Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and the associated Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS). This has greatly exceeded the initial commitment that was made by Scottish Councils to resettle 2,000 of the 20,000 people being resettled in the UK between 2015 and 2020.
3. The VPRS and VCRS are due to conclude in March 2020. Over the past 12 months COSLA, Scottish Government and our local and devolved government colleagues across the UK have been pressing UK Government to announce plans for resettlement post 2020. We were becoming increasingly concerned that the lack of clarity regarding the UK's position on resettlement beyond 2020 was having a detrimental impact on the ability of councils to plan their long-term approach to resettlement. There was also a real danger that the removal of funding at the end of current programmes would have resulted in the loss of invaluable experience and expertise that has built up within councils over the last four years.
4. The announcement from the Home Secretary in the UK Parliament on 17 June has provided much needed clarity in this regard and will enable councils to make informed decisions regarding their role in resettlement going forward.
5. In addition to supporting resettled refugees, a number of councils in Scotland support UASC who have either been placed with them through UK Government schemes, or who have arrived by other routes (so-called spontaneous arrivals). Leaders will recall that in, February 2018, the National Transfer Scheme, legislated for in the Immigration Act 2016 to enable the dispersal of UASC across the UK, was extended to cover Scotland.
6. However, while COSLA was part of successful lobbying which recently achieved an uplift in the daily rate paid to Local Authorities that support UASC, the National Transfer Scheme remains fraught with difficulties and no Local Authorities in Scotland have been able to participate to date, though a number are supporting young people who have come to the UK under s.67 of the Immigration Act (the 'Dubs Amendment').

What is Changing?

Refugee Resettlement

7. Leaders will have received a letter from the UK Immigration Minister on 17 June, outlining details of the UK's ongoing commitment to the resettlement of refugees. The letter is attached to this paper at Appendix A.
8. While the detail of the scheme is to be worked through over the coming months, the information that is currently available regarding it is that:
 - i. All current resettlement schemes will be replaced by one broad global scheme. This will bring consistency of provision for all refugees who are resettled in the UK and will broaden the geographical focus of current schemes beyond the Middle East and North Africa;
 - ii. The 5-year funding tariff that is currently in place for both the VPRS and VCRS schemes will continue, along with the provision of additional funding for exceptional cases;
 - iii. Current levels of resettlement will be sustained, with the aim of resettling approximately 5000 people across the UK in the first year of the new scheme in 2020/21;
 - iv. The scheme will continue to allow Local Authorities to sign up on a voluntary basis;
 - v. The scheme will continue to be based on UNHCR vulnerability criteria. However, it will not just be focused on Syrian refugees but on those that are in the greatest need across the world, to enable the UK to respond to immediate crises where appropriate;
 - vi. An additional emergency resettlement route is to be developed to allow the UK to respond quickly to instances when there is a heightened need for protection and to provide a faster route to resettlement where lives are at risk; and
 - vii. Community Sponsorship will continue and refugees who enter the UK through this scheme will be in addition to those who arrive through resettlement.
9. With regard to funding, Local Government associations across the UK have been lobbying on behalf of Local Authorities to secure a realistic funding package to ensure participation in any scheme post 2020 remains feasible. It is positive that UK Government has taken our feedback into account and is continuing to provide the same level of funding that has enabled the current schemes to run successfully.
10. It is anticipated that the 'ask' from UK Government will be that Scotland resettles approximately ten per cent of all those being resettled in the UK. While Scottish Councils have, in many ways, led the way on resettlement over the past four years (well over ten per cent of the 20,000 refugees the UK is committed to resettle by 2020 have already been resettled in Scotland), participation rightly continues to be a decision for individual Local Authorities to take.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

11. The National Transfer Scheme (NTS) has been running in England since 2016 and has been open to Scottish Local Authority involvement since February 2018. While the prioritisation of unaccompanied children being transferred from Europe under s.67 of the Immigration Act (the 'Dubs Amendment'), and through the VCRS, has impacted upon the number of children being transferred through the NTS, it is apparent that the NTS itself is not fit for purpose. There have been decreasing numbers of Local Authorities across the UK participating and, despite an openness to participate from a number of councils in Scotland, there have been no successful transfers to Scotland at all. This is resulting in increasing pressures on those Local Authorities that experience high numbers of spontaneous arrivals.

12. In light of this, the Home Office-chaired UASC Governance Board, of which COSLA is a member, is exploring the redesign of the National Transfer Scheme to facilitate the involvement of more Local Authorities across the UK. It is important that the views of Scottish Local Authorities are fed into these discussions in order that the Scheme provides the best possible solution for the young people themselves, and for the Local Authorities that are involved.
13. More broadly, COSLA continues to lobby UK Government for full cost recovery for supporting UASC, including through the current review of funding provided by the Home Office for former UASC leaving care.

Proposed COSLA Position

14. With respect to resettlement, Leaders are asked to agree that COSLA engages with individual Local Authorities over the coming months in order that a picture can be built of Councils' ability to participate in the new scheme. This will enable COSLA to provide feedback to the Home Office regarding the scale of the commitment that can be expected from Scottish Local Authorities going forward.
15. Notwithstanding the number or proportion of refugees that are ultimately resettled in Scotland, Leaders are also asked to reaffirm the broad commitment from Scottish Local Government to support the UK's role in resettling those who have to flee from persecution in their country of origin.
16. In addition, it is proposed that COSLA continues to work with the Home Office and Local Authorities to ensure any redesign of the National Transfer Scheme for UASC is fit for purpose. A central element of this engagement will be to continue lobbying UK Government for full cost recovery to support the role that Local Government plays in this regard.

Next Steps

17. Subject to agreement from Leaders, COSLA will engage with Councils regarding their involvement in resettlement going forward, and their views on the best means of supporting UASC. These perspectives will inform our ongoing discussions with the Home Office.

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