

Meeting:	Cabinet
Meeting date:	Thursday 28 May 2020
Title of report:	Future refugee resettlement
Report by:	Cabinet member health and adult wellbeing

Classification

Open

Decision type

Key

This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant having regard to: the strategic nature of the decision; and / or whether the outcome will have an impact, for better or worse, on the amenity of the community or quality of service provided by the authority to a significant number of people living or working in the locality (two or more wards) affected.

Notice has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 9 (Publicity in Connection with Key Decisions) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose and summary

To endorse the approach to a long term flexible commitment to the ambition of resettling at least 125 refugees in Herefordshire over a period of five years. As part of this approach, authority will be delegated to the cabinet member for Health and Wellbeing to agree numbers and services procured in any one year, subject to funding instructions from the government.

The council and its partners have successfully resettled 95 refugees in Hereford between 2016 and 2019. The families have been welcomed by local people and have made a positive contribution to their local communities in a variety of ways.

Local Authorities are being asked by the Home Office to consider making a further pledge to accommodate refugees through resettlement programmes. The council has been formally

approached by the Director of Resettlement, Asylum Support and Integration for UK Visas and Immigration to confirm how many refugees Herefordshire will pledge to resettle in 2020-21.

Whilst the Home Office has only announced a resettlement programme for 2020/21 at this time, it is anticipated that future years will bring further resettlement programme announcements. In light of this it is proposed that Herefordshire adopts a similar approach to other local authorities who are exploring a longer term policy approach to refugee resettlement, to enable a prompt response to future requests.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- (a) a long term flexible commitment to the ambition of resettling at least 125 refugees over five years is approved.**
- (b) authority to determine numbers of refugees resettled in any one year and any associated logistics is delegated to the director for adults and communities, in consultation with the cabinet member for health and wellbeing.**

Alternative options

1. Not to make any further commitment to the refugee resettlement scheme at this time. This option is not recommended as participating in the scheme broadens Herefordshire's diversity, supporting economic and community growth and resettlement has been successful, suggesting little reason not to extend further.
2. To make a specific pledge or pledges to the Home Office to take a certain number of refugees during a finite short period. This approach is not recommended as uncertainty around the availability of housing makes it difficult to accord with specific numbers and timescales involved. This might also have the effect of limiting the numbers of refugees resettled over a period and complicating the arrangement of support provided. A longer range commitment to more substantial numbers may reflect more appropriately the interest and commitment of the council and Herefordshire residents.

Key considerations

3. Herefordshire's initial commitment to refugee resettlement was made through a cabinet decision in May 2016 to resettle 60 refugees through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. A subsequent decision was made in December 2017 to resettle a further 35 refugees through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme or the Vulnerable Childrens Resettlement Scheme. A significant majority of the people who have been resettled in Herefordshire have remained living in the county. The resettlement scheme appears to have gone well to date with no significant issues or pressures.
4. In 2019 the Home Office announced a new global resettlement scheme which effectively combines all prior refugee resettlement schemes into a single programme. Eligibility to be

considered for resettlement under the global resettlement scheme continues to be based on vulnerability and need. The Home Office will work closely with the UNHCR, the United Nations Refugee Agency, to identify the most vulnerable refugees from around the world to be offered resettlement in the UK. Regional Strategic Migration Partnerships will continue to facilitate the placement of refugees to the UK within Local Authority areas. The council have been formally approached by the Director of Resettlement, Asylum Support and Integration for UK Visas and Immigration to confirm how many refugees Herefordshire will pledge to resettle in 2020-21.

5. There are a number of logistical considerations that will need to be taken into account when determining how many refugees may be welcomed to Herefordshire through resettlement schemes in any one year. These include the availability of housing, school places and health services. Once a pledge is made, detailed matching of available housing and services to cases requiring resettlement will be carried out between the West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership and council officers.
6. Those resettled to date have all been found housing from the private rental market prior to arrival, although subsequently, some have moved on to alternative private or social housing as appropriate to their changing needs. It is proposed that refugees continue to be provided with housing through the private rental market and are not prioritised for social housing on arrival, to minimise possible community cohesion issues. Whilst the availability of affordable private rental properties of a suitable size for families presents the greatest challenge to enabling refugee resettlement in Herefordshire, the council has adopted policies which will help resolve the issue over time. It has set out in the County Plan 2020 - 2024 a commitment to 'Build publicly owned sustainable and affordable houses and bring empty properties back into use' therefore creating greater capacity in the housing stock..
7. The status of those resettled under the scheme means that on arrival to the UK they are able to benefit from public funds and seek employment. At the end of the five year resettlement programme individuals are able to make a claim for settled status, if they are not able or do not wish to return to their country of origin. If settled status is awarded, they may remain living in the UK indefinitely, although the resettlement programme and any support provided by within it will cease after five years.
8. Under both the current and 2020-21 global resettlement schemes, the Home Office provides five years of funding including exceptional costs relating to social care or health needs, one-year education funding for 3 – 18 year olds and one year of funding to the CCG. The council is required to use Home Office funding to meet refugee needs and enable them to gain independence through their resettlement journey. These needs may need to be met through the procurement of commissioned services, direct employment of additional staff or a combination of both.
9. Whilst there is no obligation or threat of punitive measures if Herefordshire were not to engage in further commitment to resettle refugees, there is evidence of past success with this scheme and participation supports vulnerable people, meeting moral and ethical obligations. Further participation enable Herefordshire to strengthen the more general offer to the migrant population through the development of knowledge and experience of local service and communities.

Community impact

10. There is now a small established community of Arabic speaking, predominantly Syrian, refugees resettled in and part of the community in Herefordshire. This group forms part of

a wider, more diverse local community of Muslim people which contributes to Herefordshire's local culture and economy. The new resettlement scheme will bring refugees to the UK from anywhere in the world. Any further commitment that included Arabic speaking refugees would have the benefit of joining an established resident population and would add value to it and the wider community. A further resettlement pledge by the council would support the refugee community to grow and strengthen their presence and contribution to the economy as Herefordshire residents, thus supporting the council priorities to support and strengthen communities to ensure everyone lives well and safely together.

11. Further refugee resettlement will bring additional benefits to Herefordshire's economy. Working age adults will come with a variety of trades and professional skills and a desire to be independent and contribute to local society. As part of family groups, resettlement will also bring young people motivated to learn English and contributing to a diverse future workforce. This will support the ambition of developing a thriving and prosperous economy, as set out in the County Plan 2020 – 2024. Previous resettlement schemes have enriched Herefordshire communities and workforce, including a number of skilled workers, who have contributed to the local economy through volunteering and employment. Development of English remains a commitment of both the refugee community, the council and voluntary groups to enable further participation in communities and access to employment. This commitment and support should be continued and further developed in any future refugee resettlement.
12. From the start of the refugee resettlement scheme in Herefordshire there has been significant support for refugees from a number of residents. The previous commissioned provider trained and utilised a number of volunteers from the local community. Further to this a Herefordshire branch of the City Of Sanctuary movement has been established, with a number of volunteers providing access to events and offering a drop in service, which includes additional English practice, for refugees and other migrants.
13. Whilst nationally and locally the number of racially or religiously aggravated offences recorded by the police between April 2013 to March 2019 has shown an increase, there has not been any notable or reported crimes of this nature against the local refugee population.
14. A multi agency strategic migration group has continued to meet regularly, with representation from key stakeholders including; health, social care, education, housing, environmental health, voluntary sector, police and the DWP. This multi-agency partnership is proactive in enabling the resettlement of refugees, community cohesion and addressing any issues or concerns as they arise. It managing further resettlement it is likely to be focused particularly on the availability of suitable housing and secondary school places. .
15. The recommended decisions will not have any direct or indirect effect on the lives of looked after children or care leavers.

Equality duty

16. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:
A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
17. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. Any contracted providers required to meet the needs of resettled refugees will be made aware of their contractual requirements in regards to equality legislation.
18. The Equality Act 2010 established a positive obligation on local authorities to promote equality and to reduce discrimination in relation to any of the nine 'protected characteristics' (age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; marriage and civil partnership; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation). In particular, the council must have 'due regard' to the public sector equality duty when taking any decisions on service changes.
19. It is recognised that refugee resettlement brings positive impact for people sharing a number of protected characteristics, both among refugees themselves and for the communities they are joining. The groups benefitting will include black and minority ethnic people, young people and disabled people. Possible detrimental impact on resettled refugees with a protected characteristic has been explored and is noted in appendix 1. This includes considering individual needs of any refugees resettled before accepting a case allocation, for example whether there is suitable housing and capacity in the health system for any specialist health issues. Recognising that resettled refugees will form part of a minority ethnic group, this may make refugees more vulnerable to racial abuse or discrimination. All refugees will be supported to understand how to report and deal with any racial abuse or discrimination.

Resource implications

20. The current provision by the Home Office is to provide five years of funding for the resettlement programme, including exceptional costs relating to social care or health needs, one-year education funding for 3 – 18 year olds and one year of funding to the CCG. Additional funding will be made available by the Home Office, on a case by case basis, for exceptional costs, including; property adaptations, void costs for larger (4 bed) properties, special educational needs, and adult social care. As the refugees settle into life in Herefordshire they will become part of the resident population and be entitled to the same services as other residents. There are no anticipated financial implications in respect of further commitment to refugee resettlement. Whilst part of the global resettlement programme any specific needs as a resettled refugee will be met through the Home Office funding
21. Any future commitment to supporting resettled refugees will consider the viability of the scheme under any changes to future funding instruction to minimise any resource implications on the council or partners.

Legal implications

22. The council's participation within this scheme remains voluntary, meaning that there are no legal requirements to give a commitment to resettle any refugees. Guidance supplied by the Home Office has offered assurances that support to any Local Authority who partakes, will be supported.
23. By giving a commitment, the Council in turn agrees to provide and offer the necessary support to individuals under the resettlement scheme.

Risk management

24. If the recommendations are approved council officers will work with the cabinet member for health and wellbeing to agree the number of refugees that may be resettled in Herefordshire in any one year in response to Home Office requests. This will take into account a number of logistical considerations, primarily the availability of suitable housing and the economies of scale to be able to meet refugee resettlement needs within the funding available from the Home Office.

25.

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
Community cohesion could be undermined if refugees and asylum seekers were not integrated locally	Continue to work with police, community cohesion colleagues, volunteers and the established migrant community to role model the equality values of respecting different cultures, challenging discrimination and promoting acceptance.
Changes to future resettlement scheme funding arrangements.	Any refugees resettled under the 2020/21 resettlement scheme will be funded through the five year programme funding instructions as previous cohorts. Any resettlement pledge beyond 2020/21 will be subject to adequate funding being made available from the Home Office.
Pressures on resources, particularly in relation to education and housing.	Any commitment made will be subject to sourcing of available property from the private rental market. The profile of cases will be presented after housing has been secured. When considering these profiles for resettlement in Herefordshire education colleagues will be consulted with regards to available school places for any children in the family. The county plan indicates the

possibility to build a significant number of affordable houses. As a result, Herefordshire residents who are currently living in private rental properties may move onto more affordable housing therefore freeing up some capacity in the private rental market.

Further resettlement will bring opportunities to strengthen the diversity and cohesion of communities in Hereford and the county.

Resettlement will also bring an increase in working age people and young people to contribute to the local economy.

26. Identified risks will be managed by the corporate lead officer who will report to the director and cabinet member for health and wellbeing.

Consultee

27. The multi-agency strategic migration group, with representation from key stakeholders including; health, social care, education, housing, environmental health, voluntary sector, police and the DWP have considered the recommendations. With careful consideration of available housing and education provision, as well as any emerging health needs, the group is supportive of the proposed recommendation to take a five year policy approach to further refugee resettlement.
28. Consultation with political groups has been undertaken. The Green Group have responded stating that they strongly support the expansion of Herefordshire's involvement in refugee resettlement. The group would like the council to consider whether greater numbers could be welcomed over the 5 years, given that there are minimal financial implications for the council and the excellent record of the scheme so far. They have asked what the maximum that Herefordshire could welcome, given constraints in the housing market etc?
Response: Estimating the number of refugees who could be successfully resettled at any one time is complex and requires consideration of housing that is available and affordable within the private rental market. Other factors such as the availability of school places, access to services and community cohesion must be considered. Whilst housing was secured for the 35 people who were welcomed through refugee resettlement schemes in 2018, family sized housing was increasingly challenging to secure and required a staggered arrival and smaller families were considered to reach the pledge of 35. Advice from the Strategic Migration Partnership is that resettlement is predominantly required for families requiring three bed or larger properties. On reflection cabinet members would like to set the ambition of resettling a minimum of 125 refugees over five years, the recommendation has been amended accordingly.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - EIA

Background papers

None identified