

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

23 OCTOBER 2018

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

VULNERABLE PERSON'S RESETTLEMENT SCHEME (VPRS)

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval from Cabinet to resettle a further 5 refugee families under the Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) or the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS); and
- 1.2 Subject to approval from Cabinet, a waiver under paragraph 3.2.9.2 of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules from the requirement to obtain quotes or tenders by open competition shall be sought under the Scheme of Delegation in order to vary the existing contract with Hafod Housing Association for the additional 5 units.

2. Connection to corporate improvement objectives/other corporate priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate priority/priorities:
 - Helping people to be more self-reliant – taking early steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services.

3. Background

- 3.1 The UK Government has committed to resettling 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020, fleeing Syria as a result of the civil war. The number of refugees likely to be received in Wales is 1,000 to 1,500 over the five years of the VPRS Programme, however it should be noted that participation is voluntary.
- 3.2 Individuals are granted refugee status giving them leave to remain for 5 years with full access to employment and public funds. At the end of the 5 years, if they have not been able to return to Syria, they may be eligible to apply for settlement in the UK.
- 3.3 On 5th July 2016 Cabinet approved:
 - Bridgend's participation in the UK Government Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS).
 - The procurement of a support provider for refugee families which met the minimum support requirements set by the Home Office and ensured support is provided for a minimum period of 12 months.

- Resettling 6 families by March 2018 and utilising one Registered Social Landlord (RSL) to co-ordinate the management of the properties.
- 3.4 The Welsh Refugee Council was awarded the contract for the provision of support for the refugee families. The contract is for 12 units and ends on 31st October 2019.
 - 3.5 Hafod Housing (Hafod) was awarded the contract for the provision of housing management (the landlord function). The contract is for 7 units and ends on 31st January 2020 (with the option to extend for a further 2 years).
 - 3.6 The properties used for resettlement are normally leased from private sector landlords by Hafod and are furnished utilising Home Office funding prior to the families arrival. Rents are affordable and are at the rate of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA).
 - 3.7 The first Syrian family arrived in the county borough on 2nd November 2016. All 6 families have now been resettled (a total of 31 refugees, now 34 refugees following the birth of 3 new babies to 3 of the families) with the last family arriving on 12th September 2017.
 - 3.8 The families have been resettled in various locations across the county borough, all with good access to local schools and amenities. Community members have been welcoming of the new families and some neighbours have taken the time to befriend the mums and dads. Local churches have also been very supportive providing donations and organising coffee mornings.
 - 3.9 The South Wales Police Hate Crime Officer and relevant Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), together with the support provider, visit the families once they have settled into their new homes to introduce themselves and help settle the families into their communities.
 - 3.10 The families have been through some very traumatic experiences prior to resettlement and this has resulted in some of the adults suffering with depression and requiring referrals for psychological counselling. The families can sometimes feel isolated because of the language barrier and because of the small Arabic speaking community in the county borough. In other parts of the UK and Wales this has sometimes led to families choosing to relocate to the bigger cities such as Cardiff, however, these moves are not always supported by the Home Office or the Local Authority. Families who have relatives still residing in Syria or the neighbouring countries surrounding Syria often worry about their safety and wellbeing, which can cause further stress.
 - 3.11 The families are provided with a rolling 12 month bus pass utilising Home Office funding. The bus passes help the families to orientate and help to build confidence and independence. The families have also been provided with Halo leisure passes for 12 months, utilising Home Office funding, to help with any depression, isolation and their overall health and wellbeing.
 - 3.12 The children are settling well into their new schools and have been welcomed by their classmates who are keen to learn more about the family's language and culture. In addition to the Arabic speaking Learning Support Officer and the English speaking Learning Support Officer who support all of the children, Home Office

funding is also provided directly to the schools in order for them to employ their own staff or utilise agency staff as necessary and to also purchase resources such as Arabic / English books. The Arabic speaking Learning Support Officer has since left the Authority but substantial support continues to be provided to the children.

- 3.13 Work is underway to facilitate training, work experience and volunteering for the adults in the families however, language continues to be a barrier and therefore regular and continued attendance at English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Classes continues to be a priority.

4. Current situation/proposal

- 4.1 In 2016 the UK Government introduced a new scheme called the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) which aims to resettle children and their families from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region at risk from the conflict in the Middle East. The UK Government aims to resettle up to 3,000 vulnerable and refugee children and their families by 2020. The Scheme will not solely target unaccompanied children, but will also extend to vulnerable children at risk, such as those threatened with child labour, child marriage and other forms of abuse or exploitation. It will be open to all 'at risk' groups and nationalities within the region. The Scheme is in addition to the commitment to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and both Schemes operate in exactly the same way.
- 4.2 On 3rd July 2017 the Home Secretary amended the scope of the Syrian Vulnerable Person's Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) with immediate effect to enable the most vulnerable refugees in the MENA region who have fled the Syrian conflict, regardless of their nationality, to be resettled. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) will continue to identify and refer the most vulnerable refugees but will no longer limit the scheme to those with Syrian nationality. However, the UNHCR will only refer those who are genuine refugees, in that they cannot seek the protection of their home country.
- 4.3 On 8th March 2018 Cllr Susan Elsmore, Co-Chair of the WLGA Strategic Migration Partnership (WSMP) and WLGA Joint Spokesperson for Equalities, Welfare Reform and Anti-Poverty, wrote to Local Authorities asking what the commitment to resettlement under the VPRS would be going forward. In response to this letter and as set out in the report to Cabinet of 5th July 2016, the number of families and individuals to be resettled in any subsequent years of the Programme was reviewed and it is proposed that the Authority resettles a further 5 families during the remainder of the Programme. The Leader of the Council responded on 29th March 2018 advising that the Local Authority envisage being able to resettle a further 5 families during the remainder of the Programme, but this is an indicative answer rather than a firm commitment, until Cabinet approval has been received.
- 4.4 The recommendation to resettle a further 5 families under either the VPRS or the VCRS (depending on the most urgent need for resettlement at the time) has been determined by taking into account capacity within the Welsh Refugee Council contract for the provision of support, the capacity within schools and the availability of appropriate housing in the county borough. Any resettlement under these Schemes in the county borough will not include unaccompanied children.

4.5 In order to resettle further refugee families and to ensure consistency of service for refugee families resettled in the county borough, a waiver to the Contract Procedure Rules would be required to vary the Contract with Hafod for the provision of housing management (the landlord function). Should Cabinet approve the recommendation to resettle further refugee families, the waiver shall be dealt with in accordance with the Scheme of Delegations. This is at a cost of £178.57 per month per unit (utilising Home Office funding and totalling an additional £32,142) and is only paid when the units are utilised.

4.6 In addition to ensuring consistency of service, the variation to the Contract with Hafod would enable the Council to respond to the resettlement need quickly without having to procure a new contract (noting that when the contract was last procured Hafod were the only provider that submitted a bid) and to utilise Hafod's experience of managing tenancies for refugees. Hafod currently has 2 properties available in their leasing scheme which are appropriate for use to resettle refugees.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

5.1 There are no effects upon the Council's policy framework or procedure rules.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 A Screening for Equality Impact has been undertaken which showed that the Schemes will positively help to deliver the Council's equality duties as it helps to secure accommodation for a group of people with protected characteristics.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications

7.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Assessment has been carried out. The schemes contribute to the following goals within the Act:

- A more equal Wales – by enabling people with different backgrounds and circumstances to fulfil their potential through access to education, ESOL, training, volunteering and employment opportunities.
- A Wales of cohesive communities – by bringing people together from different backgrounds and circumstances in safe and well-connected communities.
- A globally responsive Wales – by helping people from other parts of the world be safe from harm, whilst enhancing the social and cultural diversity and wellbeing of Wales.

8. Financial implications

8.1 Year one funding is available from the Overseas Development Aid budget (Home Office) to fund costs of Syrian refugees on a per tariff basis. The year one tariff is for direct local authority costs and there is also additional support for educational and medical needs. Direct local authority costs cover management of the scheme, housing management costs (rents will be subject to Housing Benefit Claims), support costs and cultural integration including English language provision.

8.2 Year two to five funding will be allocated on a tapered tariff basis over four years.

This funding includes support for integration such as additional English language training as well as social care. The Home Office funding is flexible to enable the Authority to continue to provide funding for schools and health services in years two to five. However, there is an expectation that the reliance on paid support will be reduced in line with the tapering of the tariff and that existing funding routes will be used to provide funding for schools and health services in years two to five. This approach will be an integral part of any commissioned support services.

8.3 In addition, individuals will be able to access welfare benefit payments (subject to the statutory limit) and other public services.

9. Recommendation

9.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:

9.1.1 Approves the resettlement of a further 5 families by 2020 with flexibility to resettle families from either the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) or the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS), depending on the most urgent need for resettlement at the time; and

9.1.2 Subject to approval from Cabinet, a waiver under paragraph 3.2.9.2 of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules from the requirement to obtain quotes or tenders by open competition shall be sought under the Scheme of Delegation in order to vary the existing contract with Hafod Housing Association for the additional 5 units.

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16 October 2018

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Background documents: None