

# BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

## REPORT TO CABINET

8 MARCH 2022

### REPORT OF THE CHIEF OFFICER – FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND CHANGE

#### UPDATE ON REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT SCHEMES

#### 1. Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to:-

- Provide an update to Cabinet on Bridgend County Borough Council's (BCBC) Refugee Relocation Schemes, specifically the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Scheme and the Afghanistan Refugee Resettlement Scheme
- Seek approval from Cabinet to resettle a further three refugee families under either the UK Resettlement Scheme, the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme or the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy

#### 2. Connection to corporate well-being objectives/other corporate priorities

2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objective under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:

- **Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient** - taking steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services. Supporting individuals and communities to build resilience, and enable them to develop solutions to have active, healthy and independent lives.

#### 3. Background

##### Syrian Refugee Resettlement Scheme

3.1 On 5 July 2016 Cabinet approved Bridgend's participation in the UK Government Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS), to support the UK's commitment of resettling 20,000 Syrian refugees who had fled as a result of civil war. Cabinet initially approved the resettlement of six families.

3.2 On the 23 October 2018 Cabinet approved the resettlement of a further five families through either the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS) or the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS). This commitment took the total resettlement pledge to eleven families across both Syrian Refugee Resettlement Schemes. Both the VPRS and VCRS have now ended. From March 2021 the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) is in place to resettle vulnerable refugees in need of protection from areas across the globe.

3.3 To support the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Schemes a procurement exercise was undertaken to appoint a dedicated support provider for the service. Initially the

provider was The Welsh Refugee Council, however Taff Housing Association were successful as part of a recommissioning process and have been the provider since 1 November 2019.

- 3.4 A separate procurement exercise was undertaken to appoint a dedicated housing management service for the privately rented properties utilised to accommodate the families. Hafod Housing Association were appointed and remain the provider of this service.
- 3.5 BCBC has claimed a Home Office Refugee Resettlement Grant for each refugee relocated. The funding is in place for five years from the arrival of each refugee and provides £20,520 for each refugee relocated. Funding tapers off in each of the five years. Funding for Education is also available in the first year of support, with the amount dependent upon the age of the child.

#### *Afghanistan Refugee Resettlement Scheme*

- 3.6 In August 2021 BCBC committed to support the United Kingdom's Afghan Locally Engaged Staff Ex Gratia & Afghan Relocation and Assistance Schemes (ARAP). The schemes were established for Afghan interpreters and other personnel who have worked with the UK in Afghanistan. BCBC committed to resettling three families through the Scheme.
- 3.7 Whilst there have been several changes to the Home Office funding arrangements for ARAP, final funding instructions now confirm that BCBC will be able to claim grant funding of £20,520 for each refugee relocated. Funding will be in place for a period of three years, with funding tapering off in each year. Funding for Education is also available in the first year of support, with the amount dependent upon the age of the child.

### **4. Current situation/proposal**

#### *Syrian Refugee Resettlement Scheme*

- 4.1 BCBC has successfully met its pledge of resettling eleven Syrian Refugee families. A total of fifty four refugees have been relocated, with several of the families also welcoming babies into their households, since arriving in the borough.
- 4.2 The first family arrived on 2 November 2016 and the last on 18 November 2021. The last family were delayed in being resettled due to the Covid 19 pandemic. The families have been resettled in various areas throughout the county borough.
- 4.3 The families are at different points in their resettlement journey. One family has left the county borough, whilst the first family to arrive recently reached their five year resettlement anniversary (2 November 2021). Four other families will reach this point in 2022. Several individuals have been supported to secure employment, whilst others are engaged in education.
- 4.4 Dedicated resettlement support to these families is relatively minimal, with the focus at this stage on ensuring the long term immigration status of the families is resolved, given that the families have been initially relocated, on the basis of being granted leave to remain for five years only.

- 4.5 In addition to funding suitable housing and dedicated resettlement support the Home Office Grant has been utilised to support general resettlement and well-being, including supporting education, English classes, bus passes and utilising local facilities, such as Halo.
- 4.6 Throughout the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Schemes a partnership approach has been key to identifying and addressing any issues with resettlement. In addition to the support and accommodation providers, joint working with Education, Health, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Bridgend College, Welsh Government, South Wales Police, and others has supported the scheme.

#### *Afghanistan Refugee Resettlement Scheme*

- 4.7 BCBC has successfully met its initial pledge of resettling three Afghan families. A total of eleven Afghan refugees have been relocated.
- 4.8 The first family arrived in the borough at the end of November 2021 and the third family in February 2022. The families have been resettled in various areas throughout the county borough.
- 4.9 In preparation for the arrival of the families the support contract in place for the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Scheme with Taff Housing Association (referred to at section 3.3 above) has been modified to uplift the contract value to allow for increased units of support for refugees resettled under ARAP and to ensure dedicated support resource for ARAP. Utilising the same support provider will allow for consistency in support across the schemes and for the scheme to benefit from the learning of the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Scheme, which as detailed above, has been in place since 2016.
- 4.10 In addition to the above, other preparations have included the development of a welcome leaflet, arrangement of school places and registration with local GP surgeries. As with the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Scheme, upon arrival arrangements have been made for bus passes, access to Halo facilities and the provision of English classes.
- 4.11 A working group convened on 15 November 2021 to ensure a strategic and multi-agency oversight of BCBC's Afghan Refugee Resettlement Scheme. The group have agreed to meet on an ongoing basis in the initial months of resettlement and then review the frequency accordingly. Membership of the group includes, Education, South Wales Police, DWP, Health, Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations (BAVO), Registered Social Landlords and Taff Housing.
- 4.12 Please note that since BCBC committed to supporting the ARAP Scheme, the Home Office have announced the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS). This scheme will operate alongside ARAP and on the same funding basis i.e. for three years. The ACRS will provide protection for people identified as in need, prioritising those who have assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan and vulnerable people, including women, girls, and minority groups at risk.

- 4.13 The UK Government is aiming to resettle around 5,000 people in the first year of ACRS and up to 20,000 over the coming years. Local Authorities are being asked to consider increasing any existing pledges made, to support this commitment.
- 4.14 It is proposed that Cabinet approve the resettlement of a further three families under either the UK Resettlement Scheme, the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme or the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy. It is proposed that there should be flexibility to accept a family from any of the three resettlement schemes in order, to ensure resettlement to the highest presenting need, as identified by the Home Office.
- 4.15 The recommendation to resettle a further three families has been determined by taking into account capacity within the Taff Housing contract for the provision of support, and the capacity within services, such as education and housing within the county borough. Any resettlement under these Schemes in the county borough will not include unaccompanied children.

## **5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules**

- 5.1 There is no effect upon policy framework and procedure rules.

## **6. Equality Act 2010 implications**

- 6.1 An initial EIA screening has identified that there would be no negative impact on those with one or more of the protected characteristics, on socio-economic disadvantage or the use of the Welsh language. It is therefore not necessary to carry out a full EIA on this policy or proposal.

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

- 7.1 The report contributes to the following goals within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015:

- A prosperous Wales
- A resilient Wales
- A Wales of cohesive communities
- A globally responsive Wales

- 7.2 The five ways of working have been considered in the preparation of this report and are summarised below:

- Long term – Refugee resettlement supports humanitarian crisis, with the aim of delivering long term positive outcomes, supporting individuals to achieve their goals and aspirations,
- Prevention – Resettlement and the support provided to help resettle families, will aim to support families to be self reliant and reduce the burden on more costly interventions,
- Integration – Resettlement and the support provided to families will support economic, social, and cultural outcomes, both at an individual level and in wider communities.

- Collaboration – BCBC effectively engages with a range of internal and external partners on a local and national basis
- Involvement – As part of ongoing service delivery there will be ongoing involvement with a diverse range of stakeholders including families resettled.

7.3 It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report.

## **8. Financial implications**

8.1 As highlighted at sections 3.5 and 3.7 BCBC claims a grant from the Home Office to support both the Syrian and Afghanistan Refugee Resettlement Schemes.

8.2 If Cabinet approves the recommendation in this report, then a grant of £20,520 will be claimed for each refugee resettled. A grant for Education will also be available in the first year of resettlement, the amount of which depends on the age of any children relocated.

8.3 It is therefore considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable financial implications as a result of this report.

## **9. Recommendations**

9.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:

- note the contents of this report;
- approve participation in the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme;
- approve the resettlement of a further three refugee families with flexibility to resettle families under either the UK Resettlement Scheme, the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme or the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy depending on the highest presenting need for resettlement at the time.

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**8 March 2022**

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### **Background documents:**

None