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**To:** Leadership Board

**On:** 8 June 2016

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**Report by:** Director of Children's Services

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**Heading:** Resettlement of Syrian Refugees and support to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking children (UASC)

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**1. Summary**

- 1.1 77 Syrian people have now been resettled in Renfrewshire since 17<sup>th</sup> November 2015. Initial resettlement is progressing well, and officers are working with partners and communities to welcome and integrate the Syrian families within the local area.
- 1.2 Significant progress has been made in terms of registering children in educational placements, supporting the families to access health services and to learn English. A range of donated items have been given to the families from individuals, groups and communities across Renfrewshire. The support of Renfrewshire's communities has been welcomed by the Syrian families.
- 1.3 In relation to more recent developments, in line with all other local authorities in the UK, the Council has received requests from the UK Government to offer support to some of the 1000 unaccompanied asylum seeking children currently being cared for by Kent County Council, after arriving in this country through various routes.
- 1.4 Officers from the Council have explored potential options for supporting a small number of children in Renfrewshire which are outlined at Section 5. Officers from the Council are currently exploring legal and financial considerations with the Home Office in relation to these proposals. Funding to support each child or young person has been committed by the Home Office, with costs over and above this being met by the local authority where these are incurred.

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## **2. Recommendations**

### **2.1 It is recommended that members:**

- note the progress made recently to resettle Syrian refugees in Renfrewshire.
- note the work undertaken by officers to explore options for supporting unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Renfrewshire.
- note that officers will seek further clarification on the legal and financial implications relating to the provision of support to this group and;
- agree that further to the above, Renfrewshire Council will offer support to unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Renfrewshire.

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## **3. Background**

- 3.1 In September 2015, the Council agreed to formally participate in the UK Government's Vulnerable Person's Relocation (VPR) Scheme which allows Syrian people affected by the humanitarian crisis to come to the UK and hold "special" refugee status. This status allows Syrian people to live in the UK for up to 5 years and entitles refugees to access benefits and employment.
- 3.2 All refugees who are registered and resettled through the scheme come from countries bordering Syria such as Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan. Refugees or migrants dispersed throughout Europe are unable to register for resettlement through this scheme.
- 3.3 Participation in the scheme is funded by the UK Government on a unit cost basis for each person resettled. This is allocated on a tapered basis over a 5 year period. Funding is broadly allocated and payable against education, social care costs, health costs and all other local authority costs. Local authorities must agree to comply with a "Statement of Requirements" schedule which sets out the minimum level of support and service which must be provided by the host authority e.g. housing and housing support services, integration, ESOL etc. There is potential for the Home Office to audit local authorities against this Statement of Requirements.
- 3.4 The Council is required to fulfil a critical lead role in terms of co-ordinating the support required by the refugees from Council services and from other agencies e.g DWP, NHS, Jobcentre, NHS and further education placements. The Council is also charged with ensuring that refugees are supported to integrate successfully within local communities and is required to work with the refugees to agree Integration Plans covering the first year of resettlement.

## **4. Update on resettlement**

- 4.1 Since November 2015, 77 Syrian refugees have been resettled in Renfrewshire. All are part of family groupings and have been prioritised by the Home Office for resettlement due to their vulnerable status through ill-health, disability or experiences

endured as a result of the humanitarian conflict in Syria. Over half of the refugees that have been resettled are children.

4.2 The Syrian families have been supported by officers to settle within the community through a satellite team of housing, social care, and health professionals. A number of key activities have been prioritised by the Council in order to meet the requirements set out by the Home Office for resettlement, with key achievements including:

- The registration of all children in appropriate school or pre-school placements
- The registration of families with local GPs and health services
- The completion of all residency processes and documentation
- Facilitation of English language learning opportunities
- Actively engaging with family members who are keen to volunteer or to work
- The completion of integration plans for the Syrian families which seek to address the barriers to integration that some may face e.g. disability, isolation, trauma, employability.

4.3 A volunteering scheme has been set up in partnership with Barnado's in response to a significant number of enquiries from local citizens over the past 6 months, indicating a desire to offer support to the Syrian families with the resettlement process. Over 20 people have committed to the volunteer training process, with a view to helping Syrian children and their families with school homework, involving the families in social activities, and helping them to learn English amongst others. In turn the Syrian families are keen to volunteer to make an active contribution to local communities.

4.4 A range of donated items have been directed to the Syrian items from local groups and individuals who wish to welcome and support the Syrian families. These offers of help have assisted officers in warmly welcoming the Syrian families into local communities.

## **5. Unaccompanied asylum seeking children**

5.1 Elected members will be aware from recent press coverage that the UK Government has announced plans to introduce new arrangements by which local authorities can support unaccompanied asylum seeking children in the UK.

5.2 In February 2016 the Scottish Government funded Migration, Population and Diversity team, wrote to all local authority Chief Executives in relation to a request from the Home Office to resettle a number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children from Kent within the local authority area. In the region of 1000 unaccompanied children and young people are currently being supported by Kent County Council, which has been overwhelmed by the flow of lone children and young people who require support when arriving through the port entry points within the local authority boundary. All internal and external fostering and residential placements in the area are now full, as is school/further education capacity.

5.3 A recent letter from the Immigration Minister Rt Hon James Brokenshire advises that the UK government will introduce a national transfer scheme to disperse unaccompanied children from 1 July 2016. A transfer of this nature would require

secondary legislation in Scotland and discussions are underway on this matter between the UK and Scottish Governments.

- 5.4 Local authorities would be allocated funding in the region of £30-42k depending on the age of the child and a weekly care leavers payment post 18th birthday.
- 5.5 Officers from the Council have participated in national discussions on this matter and have engaged in a national working group to gather more information on the proposed transfer scheme and to consider potential options for offering support to a small number of children and young people in Renfrewshire. These include:
  - Development of appropriate foster placements
  - Consideration of an outreach model whereby older children (17-18 years) could be supported through a shared tenancy closely located to appropriate social care and housing services.
- 5.6 These options are currently being explored jointly by officers from Children's Services and Development and Housing Services. Initial discussions are planned with Kent to explore the care requirements of some of the young people more closely and to understand the lead in time for any possible resettlement. Police Scotland have been involved in initial discussions relating to the proposals and will continue to be key to taking forward arrangements locally.
- 5.7 Whilst funding of up to £40,000 per child or young person (depending on age) will be allocated by the Home Office to local authorities, there is potential for additional costs to be incurred by the council in supporting unaccompanied children in Renfrewshire which could not be anticipated in advance. For example, the needs of the child or young person may change at any time and similar to the experience with the Syrian families, the trauma of conflict and personal experiences may not come to light through initial assessment, with needs becoming apparent several months after arrival.
- 5.8 In April 2016, the UK Government also announced plans to establish a "Child at Risk" Scheme by which the UK would provide support to children affected by the Syrian humanitarian crisis in camps and countries bordering Syria, as well as those lone children who are displaced in Europe. More detail is expected on this scheme imminently.
- 5.9 In addition to unaccompanied asylum seeking children, the UK government have also indicated plans to roll-out a national transfer scheme in relation to asylum seeking adults. At present the scheme is currently operated on a contractual basis with specific cities or regions, but is under significant pressure. The timescale and detail of the adult dispersal scheme is unknown at present, and officers continue to engage in national working groups which are being updated on this issue by the Home Office.

## Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – There are financial implications relating to the resettlement of unaccompanied asylum seeking children in Renfrewshire. This is potentially a long term financial commitment for the Council and arrangements would require to be made for any costs to the Council over and above the funding provided by the Home Office, to be adequately provided for in the relevant Council budgets.

Five year funding on a tapered basis is allocated by the Home Office to support Syrian refugees. There are no immediate longer term funding concerns to make elected members aware of at this time.

2. **HR & Organisational Development** - none

3. **Community Planning** –

There are implications and opportunities for local communities as the refugees and asylum seeking children integrate within local communities. Council officers will work with local communities to support successful integration.

4. **Legal** – Unaccompanied asylum seeking children are likely to be defined as “looked after” children, and in Scotland there are additional legal implications arising from the Children’s (Scotland) Act 1995 and the Children and Young Persons Act 2014, with possible entitlement to resources and support up to age 25. These implications require to be explored with the UK Government.

5. **Property/Assets** - none

6. **Information Technology** - none

7. **Equality & Human Rights** - none

(a) The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals’ human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because for example it is for noting only. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council’s website.

8. **Health & Safety** - none

9. **Procurement** – none

10. **Risk** – Officers will continue to engage with Police Scotland and with other appropriate organisations to ensure that services meet the requirements of these vulnerable groups.
11. **Privacy Impact** - none

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**List of Background Papers – n/a**

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