

**To: Leadership Board**

**On: 6 December 2023**

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**Report by: Chief Executive**

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**Heading: Migration and Asylum Update**

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## **1. Summary**

- 1.1 This paper provides an overview of recent developments in relation to migration and asylum provision in Renfrewshire, including specific updates in relation to support Ukrainian Displaced Persons and unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people locally.
- 1.2 Section 6 of the paper provides a more detailed update in relation to the asylum dispersal programme in Renfrewshire, and specifically in relation to the streamlined asylum process which is being implemented by the Home Office, which is seeking to expedite decision making across the asylum system. This could have potentially have a considerable impact on the provision of local services, particularly housing support and homeless services, and officers have been actively working to assess the local impact and to develop options to guide our local response. This includes detailed financial planning to assess the financial implications for the organisation in the short, medium and longer term.

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that members of the Leadership Board:
- note the contents of this report;
  - note that a detailed report on developing housing and homelessness pressures will be provided to the Communities and Housing Board in January 2024.

- authorise the Chief Executive to put in place additional resources to respond to potential service pressures identified within the report over the next 3 months if these are required, in consultation with the Council Leader.

### **3. Background**

- 3.1 As previously reported to Leadership Board, Renfrewshire has a strong track record in terms of supporting people who have come to live and settle in the area through different humanitarian programmes or routes, such as the resettlement schemes for Syrian and Afghan nationals and for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people.
- 3.2 Partners and officers have developed skills and experience in terms of supporting people to settle successfully and have worked with community groups and organisations to build initial networks that aim to strengthen partnership working on this issue.
- 3.3 The last 12-18 months have seen unprecedented change in relation to migration and asylum activity, through factors such as the Ukraine humanitarian resettlement programmes, widening of asylum dispersal across the UK and increasing pressures in relation to unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people.
- 3.4 This paper seeks to provide an update for elected members on the current issues being progressed by officers and partners.

### **4. Support for Ukrainian Displaced Persons (UDPs)**

- 4.1 The Council, HSCP and partners have played a key role in national efforts to support people who arrived in Scotland and into Renfrewshire over the last 15 months, following the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. A core element of our role has been to support the establishment and ongoing operation of a Welcome Hub linked to Glasgow Airport. As at 2 November 2023, 74 Ukrainian Displaced Persons were being supported in Welcome Hub accommodation in Renfrewshire.
- 4.2 At its peak in Autumn / Winter 2022, our Welcome Hub supported over 400 Ukrainian Displaced Persons, and the reducing number of arrivals have allowed the Resettlement Team to scale back operations at the Hub in order to direct support towards those Ukrainian households who have moved on to live in the community here in Renfrewshire. We are working closely with the Scottish Government on the future role of Welcome Hubs as the number of hotels in use in other local authority areas reduces, and it is likely that there

may be a longer term requirement to deliver some level of Welcome Hub activity going forward in Renfrewshire.

- 4.3 Housing support officers also provide resettlement support to a significant number of Ukrainian Displaced Persons living across Renfrewshire's communities. As at 2 November 2023, 146 social rented tenancies have been provided to UDPs by the Council and Registered Social Landlords. The total number of households we have in community, host and social rented properties in Renfrewshire is 189 households (428 individuals).

## **5. Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)**

- 5.1 As reported to Leadership Board in September 2023, Renfrewshire has a significant level of experience in terms of supporting unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people, with a small team in place within Children's Services established to provide this support. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Renfrewshire are considered looked after by the Council. Renfrewshire Children's Services also provides support to a number of young adults who initially arrived in the area as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- 5.2 Support is currently being provided to 33 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, with some children and young people having arrived in Renfrewshire through the UK Government's national transfer scheme arrangements, whilst others have arrived "spontaneously" through local presentation to services including Police or Border Force.
- 5.3 Children's social work continues to support an additional 21 young adults who are now over the age of 18 and entitled to aftercare support. These young adults arrived in Renfrewshire as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- 5.4 The team providing the support have been experiencing resourcing pressures due to additional demands which have arisen as a result of the asylum dispersal process. Specifically, pressures have been generated through a high number of age assessment claims that have been made to Children's Social Work from residents being supported within local contingency hotel accommodation or through Migrant Help (a national organisation which supports trafficked people and has a base in Renfrewshire).
- 5.5 These claims require social workers with specialist skills and experience to work with the individuals concerned to assess age based on information available to all professionals, and to ensure that safeguarding measures and care placements are put into place where this is required.
- 5.6 A key concern for partners currently is the limited availability of suitable care placements and throughcare accommodation which is available for our care

experienced young people, including the increasing number of children and young people that are unaccompanied and require support. There is also a lack of suitable housing accommodation locally in Renfrewshire to support care experienced young people to move to more independent living settings across communities, due to the overall pressures in the local housing market.

- 5.7 Children's Services is working with colleagues in housing to explore solutions to ensure there is access to appropriate housing for our young people leaving care, including those who arrived as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

## **6. Asylum Dispersal**

- 6.1 In April 2022, the UK Government notified all UK local authorities of their intention to expand asylum dispersal arrangements across the UK, rather than through a number of agreed asylum dispersal areas such as Glasgow.

- 6.2 The Home Office's contractor, Mears, has to date identified only a small number of residential properties in Renfrewshire to support asylum dispersal, due to the current pressures being experienced in the local private sector housing market. However, two hotels have been utilised as contingency accommodation for asylum seekers in response to the large number of people currently awaiting asylum decisions across the UK currently – one hotel is being utilised in Paisley and one in Erskine.

- 6.3 In the region of 170 service users are currently being supported across these two hotels, however under the hotel maximisation policy recently adopted by the Home Office, this number could potentially increase to circa 320 if all capacity is used. Elected members may be aware of recent announcements from the UK Government that the number of asylum hotels being utilised across the UK will be reduced by 50 by the end of the calendar year. There is no current indication that hotels based in Renfrewshire will be included as part of that process.

- 6.4 In the last update paper provided to Leadership Board in September 2023, officers highlighted that as the asylum population increases locally, more people will be served with potentially positive asylum decisions whilst being accommodated in the local area. Whilst this is positive for the individuals concerned, members were advised that this could mean increased numbers of people presenting to homeless services for support who would require to be provided with temporary accommodation and the right to apply for a social rented tenancy.

- 6.5 In line with current protocols put into place by the Home Office, asylum seekers receiving a positive asylum decision have 28 days to leave existing accommodation and are directed to work with charities and the local authority to make this transition and find suitable accommodation. Those receiving

negative decisions on asylum applications, are given 21 days notice to leave existing accommodation.

- 6.6 Local services are already beginning to see this develop and in recent months 25 asylum seekers have presented as homeless following a positive decision being granted - 9 in October alone. There is also emerging evidence of people presenting as homeless in Renfrewshire who were previously staying in hotels in other local authority areas.
- 6.7 Information is passed from Mears to the Council to advise of decisions being provided to service users living in the two contingency hotels operated in Renfrewshire by Mears. The flow of information to date has been slow but should improve following recent discussions, with prior notification of presentations at our housing and homeless services being very useful to assist with resource planning.
- 6.8 The Home Office have also begun to share data through COSLA which provides an indication of the number of potential positive decisions that can be expected over the short term (3 months), given the work that is being undertaken to tackle the volume of asylum applications nationally. This is linked to the UK government's announcement this year to streamline the application process for claimants from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Libya, Syria and Yemen. Some claimants from Sudan are also being considered under the new process.
- 6.9 Elected members may be aware that Glasgow City Council have very recently declared a housing emergency further to the provision of data on the streamlined asylum process most recently. For Glasgow this indicated that more than 1400 homeless applications could be anticipated from people granted asylum before the end of 2023. In the paper provided to the City Council it was estimated that the additional cost of housing applicants under the streamlined asylum process could reach £79m by March 2025 and that Glasgow's temporary housing stock currently has a shortfall of around 1,600 properties.
- 6.10 The heat map information provided to Renfrewshire indicates that 66 positive decisions may be made in the next 2-3 months alone. If c70% of households receiving a positive decision in Renfrewshire present as homeless locally, this could translate into an addition 46 additional cases to be supported and accommodated by local services. It is not clear at present whether capacity in hotels in the longer term will continue to be utilised locally by Mears, and what the level of need could translate to on an ongoing basis in Renfrewshire in terms of homeless presentations.

- 6.11 Officers have also identified concerns that the housing challenges in Glasgow could impact Renfrewshire's housing and homeless service, as people who are unable to access accommodation in Glasgow look to surrounding local authority areas for support. There is some anecdotal evidence this is already happening on a small scale in terms of homeless presentations and the view of officers is that preparations should actively be made to prepare for the likely additional demand that this could place.
- 6.12 For example, officers have considered a scenario whereby 10% of the 1400 asylum seekers with positive decisions and seeking housing support in Glasgow in the short term, could present in Renfrewshire as homeless. This could generate an additional 140 applications in the next 2-3 months.
- 6.13 To illustrate the potential impact of these pressures, the scenarios described within 6.10-6.12, could increase the number of housing applications by c200 in the next 3 months. Typically the service supports 180-230 domestic homeless households to stay in temporary accommodation at any one time.
- 6.14 A key point to note for members, is that there is no certainty on these scenarios as described. The initial experience of other local authorities including Glasgow, is that the increase in decisions being served and presentations for housing support have been at a lower rate than anticipated. Whilst this is welcome, it is important that officers prepare for increases over short periods of time, and have appropriate contingency plans in place to support the local response if this is required.
- 6.15 The next section of this paper provides an overview of the work that is being undertaken to address the pressures on housing, children's social work and wider health services, which have been highlighted through this paper.

## **7. Responding to emerging pressures**

- 7.1 As discussed at the recent Communities and Housing board meeting, the Council is on target to allocate 49% of lets to homeless applicants this year in response to the increase in the level of domestic homelessness over the last 2 years, in line with the national trend (this figure was 41% in 2022/23). Similarly, local RSL's have been asked to increase the number and proportion of lets to those who are homeless. However the overwhelming demand for 1 bedroom properties is making it particularly challenging for all housing providers.
- 7.2 The stock of furnished properties being used to provide temp accommodation for those who have nowhere to stay has increased to 263, however like many other local authorities we are regrettably now having to use B&B on a daily basis in order to ensure that some form of accommodation can be provided for those in housing need.

- 7.3 As would be expected, the associated demand for housing support has similarly increased and whilst the range of support services and initiatives we are delivering have been successful in improving tenancy sustainment for those who have been homeless (91% of homeless households now sustain their tenancy for at least 12 months), and reducing repeat homelessness (from 9.8% in 2019/20 to 4.8% in 2022/23), services are increasingly under pressure. In line with other local authorities we require to increase capacity in order to ensure we are able to respond appropriately to the current and anticipated increase in housing pressures.
- 7.4 Officers have formed a short term working group to respond to these local pressures and utilising all remaining sources of temporary migration and asylum related funding, have progressed a number of immediate actions:
- Exploring options to use existing funding streams to create additional officer capacity in the housing support and homeless service, children's social work and in terms of overall co-ordination of the programme of work required
  - next 3 month plan being developed to ensure the organisation is able to work with partners to respond to developing housing pressures
  - Partnership discussion convened through the Strategic Migration Officer group to ensure there is appropriate partnership oversight of emerging issues.
  - Discussions are also being progressed through COSLA and SOLACE to strengthen partnership working arrangements and information flows with Glasgow City Council, and to consider options for joint working to address the collective issues faced.
- 7.5 A detailed report specifically relating to housing and homelessness service pressures is being prepared and will be presented to the Communities and Housing Policy Board in January 2024.
- 7.6 Given the challenges outlined in the paper and the relative uncertainty in terms of the scale of pressure on services over the next 3 months which may arise as a result, it is also recommended that the Chief Executive be authorised to put into place any required additional resources identified over the next 3 months, in consultation with the Council Leader.

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## Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – the increasing demand on services has been largely managed within existing resources with some additional staffing being put into place through migration and asylum funding streams allocated to the Council by the UK and Scottish Government.

As noted in the paper, the significant potential increase in homeless presentations linked to asylum population in Renfrewshire and more widely across the West of Scotland, is anticipated to create additional financial pressures for Council services. Projections are

currently being developed and will be reported to the Communities and Housing Policy Board in January 2024.

2. **HR & Organisational Development** – Grant funding allocated by both the UK Government and Scottish Government for different schemes has been utilised to fund additional support staff as required.
3. **Community/Council Planning** – Supporting New Scots to resettle in Renfrewshire is an important element of the Fairer Renfrewshire programme, and has been identified as a priority by members of the Fairer Renfrewshire lived experience panel.
4. **Legal** – relevant legal advice is sought from colleagues in relation to proposed policy changes and their impact on Renfrewshire.
5. **Property/Assets** – none.
6. **Information Technology** – none.
8. **Equality and Human Rights** - the Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. The New Scots strategy supports a human rights based approach to the resettlement of people in local communities. These principles remain core to local discussions with partners in relation to proposed policy changes which may arise
8. **Health and Safety** – none.
9. **Procurement** – none.
10. **Risk** – the paper notes potential risks in terms of increased pressure on local resources as a result of national policy changes around asylum dispersal, and particularly highlights increased financial risks which have been identified recently in relation to potentially significant pressures on housing and homeless services.
11. **Privacy Impact** – none.
12. **COSLA Policy Position** – regular updates on migration and asylum developments are considered through COSLA Leaders and policy boards.
13. **Climate Risk** – none/

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**List of Background Papers:**

None

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