

**To: Leadership Board**

**On: 1 May 2024**

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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 for Ukrainian Displaced Persons.
  - 1.2 Section 5 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. Officers have been working over the winter period to manage the impact of associated additional pressures on housing and homelessness services, which continue to experience ongoing escalation of demand. A detailed report in relation to the work being undertaken will be reported to the Communities and Housing Board on 21 May 2024.
  - 1.3 Services and partners continue to work closely to respond to emerging policy developments in relation to migration and asylum activities, and have increased the frequency and membership of the Strategic Migration Group chaired by the Chief Social Work Officer in light of the ongoing complexity of the issues being progressed collectively.
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## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that members of the Leadership Board:
  - note the contents of this report

- note the actions progressed by services and partners in terms of wider demands on public services, with additional resources allocated as highlighted in section 5.10 of this report

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### **3. Background**

- 3.1 In December 2023, the Leadership Board considered a report summarising the various pressures being experienced by services and partners as a result of a number of significant developments emerging in relation to migration, asylum and refugee resettlement activities at a Scottish and UK level.
- 3.2 It was noted within this report that Renfrewshire has a strong track record in terms of supporting people who come to live and settle in the area through different humanitarian programmes or resettlement routes, and that services and partners have worked very closely in recent years to develop the skills, experience and supports required in response.
- 3.3 The level of change experienced over the past 18-24 months in terms of migration and asylum related activities has been unprecedented, particularly in relation to the impact of the Ukraine humanitarian resettlement programme, the widening of asylum dispersal across the UK and increasing pressures in relation to unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people.
- 3.4 This paper highlighted a number of areas of resource pressure for the Council which had been identified in relation to asylum dispersal, particular in relation to the provision of temporary accommodation and housing support services linked to increased presentations from asylum seekers receiving positive decisions on their asylum status whilst staying in Renfrewshire, and potentially as a result of overflowing demand arising from asylum dispersal in Glasgow.
- 3.5 This paper provides an update for members on the issues raised in the December 2023 paper, and also highlights emerging issues for consideration.

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

- 4.1 The Council, HSCP and partners have played a key role in national efforts to support Ukrainian people who arrived in Scotland and into Renfrewshire over the last 2 years. A core element of our role has been to support the establishment and ongoing operation of a Welcome Hub linked to Glasgow Airport.

- 4.2 As of 31 March 2024, there were 28 individuals staying in Welcome Hub hotel accommodation from a high of over 400 in Autumn / Winter 2022. The reducing number of arrivals has 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, and a range of 'integration' events.
- 4.3 Housing Support Officers also provide resettlement support to a significant number of Ukrainian Displaced Persons living across Renfrewshire's communities. As of 31 March 2024, 180 social rented tenancies have been provided to UDPs by the Council and Registered Social Landlords, and 13 UDP households have been supported to move on to private rented sector accommodation. 448 Ukrainian Displaced Persons are being supported across Renfrewshire.
- 4.4. On 19 February 2024, the Home Office announced that existing Ukraine scheme visa holders will be able to apply to remain in the UK for an additional 18 months under a new Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme set to open in early 2025 (before the first UKR scheme visas start to expire in March 2025).
- 4.5 On this date changes to the Immigration Rules for applications were also laid. These changes mean that people submitting Homes for Ukraine visa applications after this time will be granted 18 months permission rather than 36 months. New sponsors of Homes for Ukraine applications must be either British or Irish citizens or have indefinite leave to remain (ILR) in the UK and commit to a minimum 6-month sponsorship period. In addition, the Ukraine Family Scheme was closed to new applications.
- 4.6 Sponsors of Ukrainian Displaced Persons who arrive under the Homes for Ukraine scheme will continue to be eligible for Thank You payments for the duration of their guest's Homes for Ukraine visa permission. This will be up to three years for sponsors of guests on a three-year Homes for Ukraine visa, at £350 per month in Year 1, and £500 per month for years 2 and 3. This also applies to sponsors of Eligible Minors. This payment is tax free and does not affect the sponsor's entitlement to benefits or their council tax status.
- 4.7 For those UDPs on an 18-month Homes for Ukraine visa (i.e. applications made from 19 February 2024), sponsors will be eligible to receive £350 per month in Year 1, and £500 for months 13-18. This also applies to sponsors of Eligible Minors.
- 4.8 Councils will continue to receive £5,900 of one-off funding per new arrival under the Homes for Ukraine scheme (including arrivals following visa changes on 19 February 2024).
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## 5. Asylum Dispersal

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 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 awaiting asylum decisions across the UK – one in Paisley and one in Erskine.
- 5.3 In January 2024 the Council was advised that Mears/Home Office intended to cease use of the hotel in Erskine by end March 2024. All service users being supported in the hotel were subsequently moved to alternative accommodation across the national asylum estate by end March.
- 5.4 Approximately 70 service users are currently being supported within asylum contingency hotel accommodation in Paisley.
- 5.5 Within the update provided to Leadership Board in December 2023, officers highlighted emerging concerns in relation to the asylum dispersal process and the intention of the Home Office to accelerate the asylum decision making process over the Winter period. Through official data received in late 2023, it was estimated that up to 66 positive decisions could be provided to people being supported by Mears in Renfrewshire into early 2024, who may present to local homelessness and housing services over the festive and winter period requiring temporary accommodation.
- 5.6 A significant additional concern was the potential impact of the asylum dispersal process in Glasgow. Prior to Christmas, Glasgow City Council had declared a housing emergency due to ongoing accommodation pressures coupled with an additional 1400 positive decisions anticipated for asylum seekers living in Glasgow over the winter period.
- 5.7 At that time officers highlighted to members that the pressures in Glasgow could potentially generate an additional 200 housing applications in Renfrewshire over the 3 months to end February. A range of measures were put into place in order to respond effectively to additional demands on the service, as reported to the Communities and Housing Policy Board on 16 January 2024. These measures include:
- meeting increased targets in 2023/24 for letting Council houses to those who were homeless,

- ensuring RSL's played their part and increased the proportion of their lets to those who were homeless,
- setting a further increased target for lets to homeless applicants in 2024/25
- increasing the stock of temporary accommodation available

5.8 Whilst the winter period has been extremely challenging for homeless and housing support services in Renfrewshire due to a range of factors influencing the local and national increase in homelessness, the additional demand relating to the asylum dispersal process has not been at the level predicted.

5.9 The number of additional homeless applications per month from those who were part of the asylum dispersal process is in single figures. Though this alone will result in a 7% - 10% increase in the total annual number of homeless applications in Renfrewshire at a time when other factors such as the ongoing cost-of-living pressures and reduction in turnover are similarly adding pressures to the local social rented housing system.

5.10 Officers are continuing to work on local contingency arrangements, as there are likely to be further tranches of the accelerated asylum decision making process during 2024. Funding drawn together from across the various migration and asylum programmes has been utilised to provide additional capacity in terms of policy co-ordination, resettlement support and housing support provision, including the continued provision of support for private sector tenants which supports local housing and homeless services to manage homelessness presentations and requirements for housing support longer term.

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## **6. Afghan Resettlement Programmes**

6.1 Elected members are asked to note that further national policy developments relating to the Afghan resettlement programmes are likely to have a future impact on resettlement locally. Officers have attended UK Government webinars in relation to the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement scheme (ACRS) which is intended to support up to 20,000 people to settle in the UK.

6.2 As part of the development of these programmes, the UK Government have been consulting on a potential cap that could be introduced to guide the level of support that each local authority across the UK would provide to these schemes ie a specific number of people to be supported over an agreed time interval. COSLA prepared and submitted a response on behalf of Scottish local authorities, in its role as the Strategic Migration Authority.

- 6.3 The Council does not currently have an agreed position in relation to the Afghan resettlement scheme, and the number of people that could be supported in Renfrewshire through this. In terms of previous schemes that the Council has voluntarily participated in such as the Syrian resettlement programme, the Council committed to supporting “its fair share” of refugees as part of the national approach in Scotland rather than confirming a specific number. It is recommended that in terms of future requests made in relation to the Afghan scheme that this general commitment is adopted, as this will allow the Council to respond flexibly in light of local circumstances and pressures.
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## 7. Next steps

- 7.1 As highlighted within the report, the pace and scale of change in relation to migration and asylum activities continues to develop, and it is essential that partners continue to regularly review and respond to local requirements as these are identified, particularly in light of the pressures being experienced in terms of local housing availability.
- 7.2 As highlighted above in this report, the Strategic Migration Group chaired by the Chief Social Work Officer has expanded its membership and increased its frequency of meetings to ensure local partners can continue to discuss and respond to emerging issues timeously.
- 7.3 A paper will be submitted to the Communities and Housing Policy Board on 21 May 2024 which will provide a detailed update on homelessness in Renfrewshire, related housing support pressures and the actions being progressed by officers and partners in response.
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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 highlighted at section 5 of the report.
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.
  7. **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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