

To: Leadership Board

On: 20 September 2023

Report by: Chief Executive

Heading: Migration and Asylum Update

1. Summary

- 1.1 This paper provides an overview of recent developments in relation to migration and asylum provision in Renfrewshire. The paper highlights a range of concurrent issues which are being monitored by partners, including support for people who have settled in Renfrewshire across communities and the potential future impact on housing and health and social care.

2. Recommendations

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

3. Background

- 3.1 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 scheme 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 terms of migration and asylum activity. This includes significant programmes of work relating to Ukrainian Displaced Persons as a result of the invasion by Russia, the roll-out of asylum dispersal across the UK beyond initial asylum areas such as Glasgow, and a significant increase in the requirement to support unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people for all local authorities across the UK.
- 3.4 As part of the new service arrangements put into place at end March 2023, the Head of Policy and Partnerships was asked to take on a strategic role in terms of co-ordinating the Council's response to Migration and Asylum related issues within Renfrewshire. In this role the Head of Policy and Partnerships works closely in particular with the Head of Housing and the Head of Childcare and Criminal Justice / CSWO and HSCP, in order to assess ongoing implications for operational service delivery and to ensure emerging risks are identified and responded to by partners.
- 3.5 In terms of governance arrangements, the Head of Childcare and Criminal Justice / CSWO has continued to chair an officer level Strategic Migration Group(SMG) which meets on a quarterly basis and is comprised of key service representatives. These arrangements have recently been reviewed and work is underway to strengthen and extend the membership, and to put into place an operational group which will consider current levels of activities and developments within communities, and escalate these to the strategic group as required.
- 3.6 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, as a result of 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.
- 4.2 As elected members will be aware, the main purpose of the Welcome Hub is to provide a warm welcome to the country, including the provision of temporary accommodation and support to those arriving, with the aim of UDPs then moving on to more settled accommodation within other local authority areas, including Renfrewshire. In practice, those arriving have often stayed many weeks and months within the Welcome Hub, due to factors including the availability of settled accommodation across Scotland.

- 4.3 Over 2000 people have been supported through the Welcome Hub to date, which has been a remarkable achievement for the core team of officers within the Housing Service that have provided this support over this period. A range of wider partners and services have also been fully involved and supportive of the work of the Welcome Hub and in supporting UDPs who stay temporarily or more permanently in Renfrewshire including colleagues in schools and learning establishments and community learning and development officers that have worked to support families living in the hub for however long.
- 4.4 In late 2022, the Scottish Government paused the super sponsor scheme. Whilst the number of arrivals and people being supported in the Welcome Hub has reduced compared to the peak, there continue to be challenges in terms of supporting people staying in the hotel to move to settled accommodation in other local authority areas. As at end August 2023, 103 UDPs (54 households) continue to be supported in Welcome Hub accommodation in Renfrewshire near to Glasgow Airport.
- 4.5 Through the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, hosts were asked to commit to providing accommodation to a UDP/their family for a minimum period of 6 months, with a £350 pm payment being made by the UK Government (through the local authority) to support the arrangements for up to 12 months. The UK Government announced an uplift in the payment for a further 12 months, at an enhanced rate of £500 pm in order to encourage hosts to sustain existing host arrangements.
- 4.6 There are currently 61 host arrangements in place in Renfrewshire. Support is available to hosts and UDPs from the refugee resettlement team, and there is significant administration and financial monitoring input from different officers to ensure relevant grant claims are made to the UK Government, and payments made to hosts as required.
- 4.7 As at end August 2023, 466 Ukrainian Displaced Persons (202 households) were living across Renfrewshire's communities with hosts or through social landlord tenancies.
- 4.8 Across our learning estate we have 85 children and young people attending our schools and early learning centres. We also have an additional 30 children and young people who reside within Welcome Hub accommodation and who are attending our schools/early years centres which were identified as part of the welcome hub strategy as the receiving schools. Almost all have settled into school life well. We are proud to share with the board that a number of young people who recently sat SQA exams have achieved excellent results and have moved onto positive destinations or have continued with their education.

- 4.9 In terms of housing, it is important to note the significant role that the Council's housing service and wider social landlords have played in terms of offering tenancies to UDPs. Renfrewshire has supported a significant proportion of people staying in the local hub to move into local tenancies, as well as to move to other areas (124 social rented tenancies between the Council (74) and registered social landlords (50)). This has placed an additional strain on the demand for social rented housing given the increase in homelessness in Renfrewshire over the last 2 years in line with the national trend.
- 4.10 The Communities and Housing Policy Board recently approved proposals to apply for repair and improvement costs for empty houses from the Scottish Government's 'Longer-Term Resettlement Fund'. Initial discussions have commenced with Scottish Government officials on the feasibility of 'last in the block' properties being repaired and used for the resettlement of UDP's, and a further report will be submitted to the Communities and Housing Policy Board providing an update on progress.
- 4.11 Discussions are ongoing at a national level in relation to funding to support UDPs across Scotland. This relates to funding for each person supported through the UK Government tariff funding arrangements, as well as Scottish Government funding to support the operation of welcome hubs. Funding arrangements for 2023/24 welcome hub provision have not yet been confirmed which represents an ongoing risk financially for the Council.
- 4.12 There is also a strong focus on moving support for Ukrainian nationals to be aligned with the national New Scots strategy, recognising that the conflict is unlikely to end in the short to medium term and Ukrainian people may stay in Scotland for a longer period than it was initially thought may be the case.

5. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

- 5.1 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. Over the past twelve months the Home Office implemented a National Transfer Scheme for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. This meant that all local authorities in the United Kingdom (not Northern Ireland) were required to accept the transfer of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children arriving in Kent and the Southwest of England. Renfrewshire continues to provide support for unaccompanied asylum seeking children who arrive spontaneously in the area. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Renfrewshire are considered looked after by the council.
- 5.2 The Home Office initially indicated that local authorities would be expected to provide support for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children equivalent to 0.07% of the general child population. The Home Office indicated recently

that due to continued new arrivals and need to rebalance the unaccompanied asylum-seeking child population they were increasing the percentage to 0.1% of the general child population.

- 5.3 The spontaneous arrivals alongside the national transfer scheme has resulted in significant pressure on finding suitable resources to provide accommodation for those children Renfrewshire is responsible for. At the present time there are no internal vacancies in fostering or residential children's houses. The independent foster care and residential childcare providers are reporting limited vacancies. The lack of accommodation options is a national issue.
- 5.4 Renfrewshire is presently supporting 30 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and 20 former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- 5.5 As noted earlier in this report there are significant pressures on securing accommodation within the local housing market. This has resulted in a delay in some young people that have been welcomed in Renfrewshire in recent years, being able to move from care placements into and beyond throughcare accommodation. It is expected that as additional arrivals are received the pressure on accommodation will continue to be problematic.
- 5.6 Over the past three months additional requests to provide support to individuals who are claiming to be children have been made by Migrant Help. Migrant Help have accepted individuals who are identified as potential victims of trafficking and providing them with accommodation in Renfrewshire. Migrant Help has noted that some of those they have provided support to have later claimed to be children and unaccompanied and request that Renfrewshire take responsibility for them. This has resulted in the local authority being served with two notices for judicial review. One of these notifications has been withdrawn with the other was not progressed by the Court. Members can be assured that Renfrewshire is discharging our responsibilities for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in our area.
- 5.7 The Home Office has indicated they are considering establishing a reception centre for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Scotland. There is no indication where the Home Office would locate the reception centre. The Chief Social Work Officer is clear the proposed reception centre model is not one which should be supported from a safeguarding perspective. In addition, he is concerned the Home Office has not considered fully the implications for the local authority in which any reception centre is located in terms of their responsibility for looked after children.

6. Afghan Resettlement programme

- 6.1 Local authorities across Scotland have also supported humanitarian schemes relating to nationals from Afghanistan. A small number of people have been supported to resettle in Renfrewshire as part of this programme, whilst in some areas of Scotland and across the UK, a significant number of Afghan nationals are being supported through hotel contingency / bridging accommodation.
- 6.2 In May 2023, the UK Government began to serve Afghan households in bridging hotels with a three month Notice to Quit (NTQ) over a staggered period. Over the last few months, local authorities with Afghan bridging hotels have been working intensively to support families out of hotel accommodation.
- 6.3 There are also a growing number of Afghan nationals in host countries such as Pakistan that are being issued with visas to come to the UK through the existing humanitarian programmes, which could continue to create additional pressures on local authorities depending on where arrivals come through.
- 6.4 The situation in relation to these programmes is being closely monitored by local officers and partners. In Renfrewshire we have begun to see Afghan nationals present for support to our housing support and homelessness services, which combined with other wider pressures and resettlement and asylum programmes, is increasingly challenging for services to manage.

7. Asylum Dispersal

- 7.1 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.
- 7.2 The Home Office's contractor, Mears, has to date identified only a small number of properties in Renfrewshire to support asylum dispersal, due to the current pressures being experienced in the local private sector housing market.
- 7.3 However, in tandem, the Home Office have also been working to secure hotel contingency accommodation to be used across Scotland, in response to the large number of asylum seekers currently awaiting decisions (due to backlogs) and the ongoing high level of arrivals being experienced in the South of England. Within Renfrewshire the Home Office have procured the use of two hotels, one in Paisley and one in Erskine which could potentially provide accommodation to around 220 people in total at present.
- 7.4 Within the hotel in Erskine, agreement was reached for this to be a mixed accommodation model, rather than accommodating single adult males alone. Elected members will be aware that weekly protests have now been held for 6

months at the hotel, involving both far right groups and counter protestors. As well incurring significant police resources, local community representatives continue to report the detrimental impact that the protests have on the local community.

- 7.5 A range of local and national community groups and organisations have reached out to provide support to asylum seekers being supported in hotel contingency accommodation in both Paisley and Erskine, which have been very important in terms of promoting their overall health and wellbeing.
- 7.6 The HSCP has worked with GPs and community health services to ensure GP registration and access to other support takes place as is required.
- 7.7 The Council recently received notification that due to pressures in the asylum system nationally, the Home Office would be seeking to maximise the use of all procured contingency hotel accommodation in Scotland. This includes implementing a policy of room sharing in hotel accommodation in Paisley. The total impact of these changes could potentially increase the number of asylum seeking adults living in local contingency hotel accommodation from 220 to 300 people.
- 7.8 In terms of the hotel in Erskine, a review is being undertaken by the Home Office to consider the impact on local services of the hotel accommodation, now that the initial capacity of 174 has been reached.
- 7.9 Officers and partners were invited to attend a multi agency forum meeting with representatives from the Home Office and Mears in mid August 2023. This provided an opportunity to express specific concerns in relation to the overall wellbeing of people living within contingency hotel accommodation, and the potential pressure on local health and housing services as these recent changes are implemented.
- 7.10 In particular there is concern that as the asylum population increase 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, 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. 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 within existing accommodation.

- 7.11 Local services are already beginning to see this happen albeit in small numbers, including people who may present who have been previously supported in asylum accommodation in other local authority areas.
- 7.12 Concerns have also been raised in relation to the potential for people staying in the asylum contingency hotels, who have been assessed as under 18 as part of their claim. In these cases the local authority would be required to provide care and support to any young person, as they would for any other vulnerable/care experienced young person. This could represent significant ongoing resource pressures for the organisation.

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – there are ongoing financial implications for the Council of participation in the provision of welcome hub and resettlement support for Ukrainian Displaced Person's, for unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people and implications for Council and partner resources in relation to the asylum dispersal programme.
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.
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/

List of Background Papers:

None

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