

Somerset County Council
Scrutiny for Policies, Children & Families Committee –
19 October 2018

Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme Update 2018

Lead Officer: Dr Orla Dunn

Author: Dr Orla Dunn

Contact Details: odunn@somerset.gov.uk; 07795286935

Cabinet Member: Cllr Frances Nicholson and Cllr Christine Lawrence

Division and Local Member: All

1. Summary

- 1.1. This report provides the Committee with an update on the Resettlement Programme, that has resettled a further ten families over the past year. There have been many successes and achievements. We have strengthened our staffing. We have made good progress on goals to assist families into work with 60% of families resettled more than six months and able to work with a member now in work. We remain in financial balance and fully funded by Home Office funds.
- 1.2. We have had some challenges to provision of English classes which we are working hard to overcome and establish resilient comprehensive and accessible services. There have also been challenges from racially motivated abuse towards our families.
- 1.3. The Resettlement programme links to the County Vision, Safer Communities, Stronger Communities aspiration and the Business Plan action *'Work with partners and communities to make Somerset a more inclusive county for vulnerable children and adults.'*

2. Issues for consideration / Recommendations

- 2.1. The Committee is asked to review the information provided in the report on how the scheme has met the four aspirations set last year:
 1. Resettle approximately ten further families across the county subject to service and support capacity;
 2. Strengthen English class provision in each area;
 3. Concentrate on volunteering and assistance into work for those resettled for a longer period of time;
 4. Strengthen workforce and other support services.
- 2.2. We have met our aspiration to resettle ten further families. In the period October 2017-September 2018, Somerset County Council has resettled 10 Syrian family groups, 3 in Mendip, 2 in Sedgemoor, 1 in South Somerset and 4 in Taunton Deane. Progress is in line with the Council decision taken in August 2016 to aim to resettle 30 families over a three-year period, subject always to capacity in relevant services.

In partnership with the Somerset County Council scheme another family have been resettled to an area in Somerset but in closer proximity to support provided by Dorset Council and supported under the Dorset scheme. A (non-Syrian) family have also arrived under the related Vulnerable Children's Scheme and

been supported by a community group who have also worked in partnership with the Council.

Table 1. Summary of numbers of families resettled to Somerset and those moving out.

Families resettled	March 2016 - Sept 2016	Oct 2016 - Sept 2017	Oct 2017 - Sept 2018
Somerset County Council Scheme	6	10	10
Community Sponsorship	0	1	1
Under Dorset Scheme	0	0	1
Families moving out of Somerset*	0	2	1

*Two families moved wishing to reside in a larger urban area and one due to marriage. One family separated with some members moving to another area and one member remaining.

- 2.3.** As of end of September 2018 we have resettled 106 individuals under the county scheme, 13 people have now moved on to other areas of the UK, and one has died (terminally ill on arrival).
- 2.4.** In line with aspirations set last year, we have worked hard to strengthen English class provision – English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) - in each resettlement area. Under Home Office funding we are required to provide eight hours per week of classes for those at Entry level or better on arrival. There is no requirement to fund English classes for those in later years or to have formal classes below this level but we use our discretion to allocate funds to this as we believe acquiring English is so fundamental to successful resettlement and is identified as important in local and national research and evaluation.

Our ability to provide sufficient classes has been challenged by withdrawal of mainstream ESOL classes for all but young adults by one local college and reduced provision in another area. In light of this, in one area we have brought this service in house for families in year one and have worked with local Community Sponsor CHARIS to provide provision for families in later years. This is a work in progress. The volunteer provision is incredibly valuable in topping up formal hours and also supporting those who are unable to get to formal classes or are at too low a level to be able to engage with formal classes.

- 2.5.** We have made good progress on our aspiration to support families into work. At the time of the national survey of 2017 arrivals (data capture April 2018), 17% of Somerset arrivals (male and female aged over 16) were in work compared to 5% of South West cohort and 3% nationally. Since that point, of our ten families who have been resettled for more than six months and are considered available for work (i.e. not signed off sick), six now have a working member and another two have a member who is volunteering with a view to strengthening work skills. This is a massive achievement given that many, on arrival, have had little English and we thank many employers who have been particularly flexible, understanding and supportive of our new starters. We are continuing to develop our links with local employers and to support the families towards employability.

- 2.6.** As the scheme intake has expanded, funds have become available to expand the workforce. This currently encompasses three Arabic speaking Resettlement Workers who provide day to day support to families. A Resettlement Officer post has taken on more of the day-to-day operational and strategic issues and in particular strengthened management for volunteers associated with the service. We have also taken on a part-time tutor to support ESOL. In one area day to day support is outsourced to Yeovil4family. We continue to make use of some additional interpreter services via the main council contract. Additional in house strategic input is provided by a Consultant in Public Health and member of getset senior management.
- 2.7.** We have sadly had challenges with some families being on the receiving end of racially motivated abuse and occasionally physical violence. We have seen this to a degree in all areas of resettlement. We have a strong response to report all matters to the police and work with them as fully as possible to support investigations. We endeavour to support the families with this process and to understand how unacceptable this behaviour is and it must always be reported and to build up their often shattered confidence to re-engage in their local area.
- 2.8.** Over the past year we have concentrated on improving documentation provided in the welcome pack for families. This has expanded topics such as financial safety, budgeting, rights and responsibilities as tenants, dealing with emergencies and accessing NHS 111 and understanding the UK school system.
- 2.9.** The scheme remains in financial balance with all costs covered by Home Office funding. As the funding tapers in later years of resettlement we consider it important to look at establishing more sustainable provision which will be able to endure beyond the end of the resettlement programme and provide a legacy of support for wider integration and if possible to widen support for all refugees to Somerset.
- 2.10.** As last year we have continued to receive amazing support from the volunteer groups across the county. We have established new volunteer support nuclei in Wellington and Bridgwater in the past year. We are very grateful and acknowledge the achievements of the many individuals who have dedicated time and support to our resettled families on their journey to integration in the UK. As the service increases in size and families are becoming more settled we are aiming to scale down and cease individual volunteer family support and move to more mainstream services. We are also planning to make use of the Council-wide Volunteer Service Contract to streamline and support some of our management of volunteers.
- 2.11.** Our goals for the coming year are:
1. Resettle approximately ten further families across the county subject to service and support capacity;
 2. Continue efforts to strengthen English class provision in each area;
 3. Strengthen our integration planning for each family including continuing to support volunteering and assistance into work for those resettled for a longer period of time
 4. Improve our procedures around and use of volunteers to support the programme
 5. Develop sustainable support provision to extend beyond the Home Office funding period.

3. Background

- 3.1. In September 2015, the UK Government announced an expansion to the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme to resettle 20,000 Syrians by 2020. Resettled families would be drawn from the most vulnerable refugees who are located in countries in proximity to Syria. We understand this scheme will come to an end with last resettlements in December 2019.
- 3.2. From September 2015- August 2016, Somerset worked on plans to prepare and resettle its first six Syrian families. Based on the early success of this resettlement a decision was approved by Council in August 2016 to aspire to resettle a further 30 families over a three-year period.

4. Consultations undertaken

- 4.1. The resettlement programme continues to take soundings from partners in district councils, the Clinical Commissioning Group, our volunteer network and local Community Sponsorship group.
- 4.2. We regularly engage informally with our families to evaluate the provision and support provided. We are planning to undertake a more formal evaluation in the coming year.
- 4.3. We return data twice a year to support Home Office evaluation of the Resettlement Scheme.

5. Implications

- 5.1. Overall the scheme continues to run well, remaining within financial balance and meeting the requirements set by the Home Office.

6. Background papers

- 6.1. None

Note: For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author.