

People and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Dorset County Council



Date of Meeting	20 March 2017
Officer	Director for Children's Services
Subject of Report	Dorset Syrian Resettlement Programme
Executive Summary	<p>The purpose of this report is:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To inform on the Syrian Resettlement Programme and its progress so far 2. For discussion about the potential of an expanded programme in the future
<p>Impact Assessment:</p> <p><i>Please refer to the protocol for writing reports.</i></p>	<p>Equalities Impact Assessment:</p> <p>An equalities impact assessment has been completed.</p>
	<p>Use of Evidence:</p> <p>Councils that have already resettled refugees through the programme have been consulted for best practice. Evidence has been gathered through partners as to what will work for their area of work.</p>
	<p>Budget:</p> <p>Funding is provided to cover the costs of the five year resettlement programme. Extra funding is available for cases with extra needs.</p>
	<p>Risk Assessment:</p> <p>Having considered the risks associated with this decision using the County Council's approved risk management methodology, the level of risk has been identified as: Current Risk: MEDIUM Residual Risk: MEDIUM</p>

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	<p>Other Implications:</p> <p>This report provides some contextual information that supports the Overview Committee's interest in racial hate crime. Whilst so far integration has been positive we want to ensure that the committee is well informed about issues that may impact.</p>
Recommendation	To note the progress and request further updates as the actions become clear to meet the Home Office requests for medium term plans.
Reason for Recommendation	
Appendices	(Note: Provide <u>public</u> web links where possible.)
Background Papers	Cabinet paper June 2016 Cabinet paper September 2016
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1. Background

- 1.1. The Dorset Syrian Resettlement Programme is the Dorset response to the national programme in which the government pledged to resettle 20,000 Syrians by the end of 2020.
- 1.2. In June 2016, a report was taken to Cabinet recommending that Dorset resettle six to eight Syrian families within a 12 month period. The first two families arrived in Dorset in December 2016 and it is anticipated that another five families will arrive by December 2017.
- 1.3. Councils are given some guidance on what they are expected to provide for Syrian families arriving through the programme. Broadly this includes:
 - Private rented accommodation including furniture
 - English lessons
 - Integration and casework support – with families being independent at the end of 12 months
 - Interpretation and translation
 - Project management
- 1.4. Councils are also required to ensure that there is appropriate available provision (alongside partners) for:
 - School places
 - Medical needs
 - Religious and cultural needs
- 1.5. Refugees are granted five years humanitarian protection status after which time they can see whether they are able to remain in the UK or can return to Syria depending on the situation.

2. Funding

- 2.1. The programme is fully funded by government through a per person tariff of £8,520 per person for the first year which then tapers off over the five years to £1,000 in the fifth year.
- 2.2. Visits were made to other local authorities who had already resettled families to see what the likely costs would be and whether the funding was adequate. It was established that the funding is adequate and that extra funding can be applied for if refugees have extra needs.
- 2.3. Funding can be pooled across all individuals in the programme meaning that services for individuals with extra needs can be more easily funded. Councils are given guidance on what the funding is meant to cover and South West Councils alongside the Home Office offer further guidance where required.

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2.4. Separate funding is made available to Clinical Commissioning Groups and Department of Work and Pensions. Education funding is provided to councils to pass on to schools.

3. Services, partners and stakeholders

3.1. A number of services, partners and stakeholders have been involved in the planning and delivery of the Syrian Resettlement Programme to date.

3.2. Dorset County Council services

3.2.1. School admissions: Admissions have helped with identifying local schools with the potential to take children arriving through the programme and liaising with these schools to ensure a smooth transition into school life. This has enabled an excellent working relationship with the schools which can be built on for the future.

3.2.2. Commissioning: Colleagues in children's commissioning have provided support awarding a grant to International Care Network (ICN), an experienced local charity, to carry out the integration casework support for each of the families resettled through the programme. Commissioning colleagues are also providing assistance with monitoring arrangements.

3.2.3. Project management: The programme has been developed through the Policy & Research Team including equalities and diversity. An officer has been seconded full-time to lead the programme along with partners and other stakeholders.

3.3. Partners

3.3.1. Housing: Housing colleagues at Dorset Councils Partnership have been involved in identifying potential landlords and properties through their existing contacts and through contacts that have been made specifically during this programme. Housing colleagues have inspected properties, drawn up tenancy agreements and liaised with landlords where necessary.

3.3.2. Schools: There has been a close working relationship with the schools taking children through the programme to identify gaps in provision and how best to spend funding that is allocated to education. The schools have worked with DCC, the caseworker and the families to ensure successful integration of children into their schools. This relationship has proved successful and can be replicated in other schools involved in the programme.

3.3.3. Jobcentre Plus: A one-stop-shop was created for financial matters including colleagues from JCP, DWP and revenues and benefits to ensure there was no delay for the families receiving financial support. This working together proved successful for the family in that they did not have any unnecessary delays and for the landlord as matters such as council tax were dealt with without his needing to be involved.

3.3.4. Skills and learning: English as a Second Language (ESOL) provision has been provided by our adult learning provider, Skills and Learning. This has only allowed for three hours per week of English tuition at the local adult learning centre and has been slightly hampered by transport and childcare issues. Extra voluntary support has been arranged to allow all adults to learn English four times per week. There are opportunities to develop further ESOL provision in the future with councils able to access a fund for developing solutions including childcare and transport.

3.3.5. Dorset Police: Dorset Police have reviewed security checks which are included in the referral received from the Home Office and provided any relevant information about the properties/locations identified as possible housing. Dorset Police have also offered to work more closely and this would be explored should the programme be expanded or the need arise.

3.3.6. Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) – Dorset CCG have reviewed the health checks included in the referral from the Home Office to ensure that appropriate services can be provided in the local area as well as supporting local GPs with identifying available provision.

3.3.7. International Care Network (ICN): ICN were awarded a grant for integration and caseworker support. This is a wide ranging role including interpretation. The caseworker also acts as a 'gatekeeper' to the family and coordinates volunteer support. A support group of local volunteers has been arranged around the families to allow them to integrate into their local community and to reduce the number of visits that the caseworker has to do in order to allow the families to become more independent in their

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local area. This model will be replicated for every family (dependent on their needs) and volunteers and groups have been identified across the county.

3.3.8. Voluntary and Community Sector: The VCS has been invaluable in the delivery of this programme and has provided and offered support such as: identifying appropriate and affordable housing, furnishing properties, managing donations of clothing and money, English learning support, befriending and orientation, support in schools, transport and translation among many other offers.

3.3.9. Some landlords have come forward to offer their properties at below market rent to make them available for this programme. Groups have formed across the county in response to the refugee crisis and officers have worked with them to provide a steer for their offers of support. Swanage Action for Refugees has raised some money which will be used to top up the rent on a property to make it affordable to a family coming through this programme. This model could be used to open up the number of properties that are available to the programme in the future.

4. What went well?

- 4.1. The support offered by the voluntary and community sector has allowed the programme to support the families in a much wider way than would have been available otherwise. Through connections made via volunteers one individual has started training as a barber in his local area.
- 4.2. The schools taking children arriving through the programme have responded positively and proactively. They have supported the children and the wider family unit offering English support and are working together to bring in a former English teacher from Syria who can help the children and teachers learn together. The children have made friends and are actively participating in extracurricular activities.
- 4.3. Dorset Councils Partnership have been integral to the success of the programme so far as the Housing Manager dedicated support from the beginning. There has also been a close working relationship with revenues and benefits and equalities and diversity.
- 4.4. The caseworker support provided through ICN has been excellent with many volunteers commenting that the families have been lucky to have such thorough support. Officers have been able to use the experience of ICN and connect them with established groups and volunteers in the area local to the resettled families. ICN are also open to suggestions and are flexible in their support to provide the best outcomes for each individual.

5. Lessons learned

- 5.1. Housing has been the most difficult issue as it needs to be within Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and near to public transport links to appropriate services. Dorset Councils Partnership has been an invaluable partner to identifying properties that could be used for this programme and the programme can be expanded to include housing partners from other district and borough councils.
- 5.2. Registered ESOL provider provision has not been as flexible as anticipated and there have been transport and childcare restrictions. Funding is available to councils to develop solutions to ESOL provision and it would be useful to investigate whether a bid could be put in for Dorset if the programme was expanded.

6. 2020

- 6.1. At a regular meeting with other project officers from across the South West councils were asked about their plans for the programme up to the end of 2020. Several South West councils have put forward their offers including Devon, Plymouth, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire. Dorset was asked the same question about an offer beyond the initial 12 month period.
- 6.2. To expand the programme a number of developments potentially need to be investigated such as:
 - Housing teams from around the county engaging with the programme
 - Alternative ways to top up LHA to widen the available pool of housing
 - A bid for the development of ESOL solutions
 - Further development and coordination of the VCS offer
 - Art and leisure as a method of integration and mental health support
 - Further support in schools
 - Further project support

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- A procurement for integration and casework support beyond the initial 12 month period
- 6.3. Guidance will be sought from Cabinet about our approach to Home Office requests for plans up to 2020 and how we take this important work forward in Dorset.

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March 2017