

HOMES & COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

15 MARCH 2021

UPDATE ON REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN NEWARK AND SHERWOOD

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Homes and Communities Committee with an update on the current position regarding refugee resettlement in Newark and Sherwood and consider future scenarios for the management of the programme in a changing national and global landscape.

2.0 Background Information

2.1 Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS)

In 2014, the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme was launched nationally and the government made a pledge for the UK to accept 20,000 vulnerable persons displaced by the conflict in Syria.

NSDC made an initial pledge to accept **45 individuals (approx. 10 families)** over the course of the programme, which ran until March 2020. NSDC received its first families in November 2016 and, with continuing Member support, has since resettled 65 individuals (13 families) which exceeded our original pledge and is summarised below:

	2016	2017		2018		2019				Totals
	Nov	Mar	Jun	Jun	Sep	Mar	Jul	Sep	Dec	
Adult	4	4	4	2	3	4	3	3	3	30
5-18	2	3	3	1	2	4	2	3	2	22
3-4	2	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	7
U3	1	1	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	6
Totals	9	10	10	5	5	10	5	6	5	65

2.2 UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS)

In June 2019, central Government announced a consolidation of existing national refugee resettlement schemes under a single United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme (“UKRS”), with an objective to resettle 5,000 individuals across the UK in 2020.

A paper was taken to the Homes and Communities Committee on 25 November 2019 to seek approval to continue with the ‘award winning’ resettlement work in Newark and Sherwood. The committee agreed and pledged to resettle (*at least*) 9 individuals (approx. 2-3 families) during 2020/21.

Unfortunately, due to risks and mitigations arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, international arrivals under the UKRS were suspended in March 2020 and have not yet resumed. However, the Home Office has recently agreed to the resumption of arrivals but this will merely be to complete the original pledge of welcoming 20,000 individuals in the period 2015 -2020 under the legacy VPR Scheme. It is anticipated that the final few hundred individuals will commence their departure process from host countries in early 2021. Newark and Sherwood, having exceeded its initial pledge, have not been asked to assist in meeting the national shortfall to complete the scheme.

At present, the Home Office have given a verbal commitment to a new scheme but details are yet to be shared with local authorities. The only certainty is that it will not be the planned UKRS scheme which was announced in 2019, and will be low key with regard to publicity.

NSDC had already secured two properties in Newark in preparation for the successor UKRS scheme, and were working towards accepting two family arrivals in June 2020. However, due to COVID-19 and on advice from the Home Office and East Midlands Councils, the Council surrendered these void properties and now await future communication on any resumption of refugee resettlement.

With this pause in refugee arrivals, we continue to focus on our partnership work to support our existing resettled families; moving them towards integration and independence.

2.3 N&S Resettlement Partnership

The Newark and Sherwood Resettlement Partnership model has been recognised across the East Midlands and nationally as being exceptional in its creativity, successful integration and empowerment of the local community to welcome and support the families. This was further acknowledged by receiving the 'Highly Commended' prize in the Transforming Lives category at the Municipal Journal Awards in 2019.

The partnership continues to go from strength to strength. Key partners are Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum, Framework Housing Association (Opportunity and Change), Home-Start Newark, Support for Syrian Refugees and Support Refugees in Southwell. The trajectory of progress for each family has been truly astonishing as they follow a well-supported programme towards work and independence.

Council staff resource has been made available by drawing down funds from the Home Office tariff to support the families in all areas including wellbeing, access to employment and skills, community development of local charities and general integration activity.

2.4 Funding and Nottinghamshire Partnership Delivery Model

VPRS funding is allocated per capita and each individual participates across a five year grant-funded programme, intended to be cost-neutral for Local Authorities in the first year. Families are funded on a tariff basis of £8,520 per individual in the first year (with school-aged children attracting additional funding contributions for education costs). The funding profile tapers across Years 2-5, with families in their final year funded at only £1,000 per individual.

Our partnership model with Nottingham City Council (NCC) is delivered under a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). SLT and Members agreed the MoU which places NCC as the accountable body for managing funds from the Home Office in accordance with their Contract and Procedure rules and Data Protection Policy (for which they take an 8 % management fee). The Nottinghamshire Partnership includes Gedling, Rushcliffe, Broxtowe and Bassetlaw and casework is commissioned as a grant-aid service level agreement between NCC and Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum, which is monitored against a robust framework of outcomes. NCC has recently negotiated a reduced fee with NNRF running to the end of financial year 20/21, taking into account COVID-19 impacts and the current suspension in arrivals.

Funding income for NSDC to date from VPRS Tariff (managed by NCC)

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Total VPR income	
Nov 16 arrivals	£184,680									
Mar 17 arrivals		£205,200								
Jun 17 arrivals		£205,200								
Jun 18 arrivals			£102,600							
Sep 18 arrivals			£102,600							
Mar 19 arrivals				£205,200						
Jul 19 arrivals				£102,600						
Sep 19 arrivals				£123,120						
Dec 19 arrivals				£102,600						
										£1,333,800

Costs for the VPRS programme

The main costs under this programme are:

- Nottingham City Council management of contracts and budget.
- Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum caseworker contract
- NSDC coordination of the local partnership
- Provision of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Language) tuition
- Employment support
- Accommodation provision and furnishing
- Integration activities

Clearly, the suspension of resettlement arrivals impacts upon anticipated income profiling across the partnership, creating resource implications for current levels of service provision. However, given funding is spread across five years of participation, there remains a period of resilience within budgets for the immediate/short term future based on the current number of families resettled.

However, in light of the suspension on future arrivals, NSDC are in discussions with NCC and wider Nott’s partners to consider future resourcing contingencies on the basis of the tapering of income as highlighted below. NCC have provided the figures below as anticipated income for NSDC from the Home Office to the end of the financial year 2024/25.

20-21	21-22	22-23	24-25
£268,566	£148,200	£69,800	£26,000
			£512,566

3.0 Proposals

3.1 Scenario Planning

Looking ahead, there are three potential scenarios which will frame resource planning for this activity:

Scenario A – Arrivals resume within FY21/22.

In this scenario, funding profiles and operational planning will inevitably be impacted upon by a reduction in income due to the current suspension of refugee arrivals. However, there is sufficient resilience within existing budgets to maintain existing service levels, skills, and resource continuity across the partnership.

Likewise, there may be operational impacts around scaling up and restarting of services, but presuming that existing skills and experience are retained, risks in this scenario remain minimal.

Scenario B – Arrivals remain suspended into FY21/22, but are still intended to resume.

Under this contingency, it is highly probable that services may require restructuring if an operational restart date remains unclarified in the medium/long term. Careful consideration will be required regarding legacy funding profiles and resourcing implications, to account for a sharp tapering of budget moving into FY22/23. Loss of key programme management skills and experience (required to efficiently restart operations) vs sustainability of budget becomes a principal risk factor across the partnership.

However, it should also be considered that with new arrivals suspended, the intensive initial family support needs are negated, allowing potential savings around third-party casework provision and local authority resource (both NCC and NSDC).

Unless further clarity emerges around resumption of arrivals, the closer the approach of end FY21/22, the more likely it is that planning for severe service reduction will be required.

Scenario C – Arrivals remain suspended beyond FY21/22, and into FY22/23.

In the absence of absolute clarity from the Home Office around planning for resumption of arrivals, it may be necessary to begin to scale-back or completely wind-up resettlement operations to remain within the existing funding envelope and disband the partnership.

Risk factors remain similar to previous scenarios, however loss of programme management skills, particularly at NCC, and support capacity due to reduction in service provision is considered highly probable under this scenario.

3.2 Mainstreaming Resettlement into Health and Community Engagement at NSDC

In order to mitigate some of the risks posed above, it was agreed with the Director – Housing, Health and Wellbeing, that resettlement activity should be managed within the Health and Community Engagement Business Unit and this is now co-ordinated and delivered by the 4 x Community Relations Officers, supported by the Senior Officer and Health Improvement and Community Relations Manager. This will ensure sustainable and appropriate support remains in place locally for our families, for the N&S Resettlement Partnership and local charity groups; Support for Syrian Refugees and Support Refugees in Southwell.

In addition, the officer responsible for the coordination of the resettlement scheme to date (Maria Brambles) was the successful candidate in the Community Relations Officer recruitment process on Friday 4 December, and is now in post in the Health and Community Engagement Business Unit.

4.0 Equalities Implications

4.1 The recommendation helps to support vulnerable people with a ‘protected characteristic’ under the Equalities Act 2010 and therefore has a positive impact on equality and diversity.

5.0 Digital Implications

5.1 The resettlement programme uses multiple digital solutions in the performance of its operations and contact has been maintained with this vulnerable group throughout the pandemic by using various digital platforms. A recent bid for ‘Home Office Exceptional Funding’ was successful in accessing additional funds to provide digital skills training for all of the refugee adults in Newark and Sherwood and this is being delivered by our ESOL education partner, Enable.

5.2 In addition, the programme coordinator will continue to work closely with the Council’s ICT team to develop further digital solutions as deemed appropriate to ensure that the resettled families and the programme partners are digitally assisted and enabled in self-serve as far as is reasonably practicable in order to meet the Council’s Digital Agenda and Local Digital Declaration.

6.0 Financial Implications - FIN20-21/8275

6.1 There are no direct additional financial implications to NSDC as a result of this update report. All the details of the funding are contained within the body of the report. Any changes to this will be reported to the Committee should they arise.

7.0 Community Plan – Alignment to Objectives

7.1 The ongoing work supporting the resettled families supports and contributes to Community Plan objectives:

- *Create vibrant and self-sufficient local communities where residents look out for each other and actively contribute to the local area.*
- *Reduce crime and anti-social behaviour, and increase feelings of safety in our communities.*
- *Improve the health and wellbeing of local residents.*

8.0 Comments of Director(s) or Housing Advisory Group

8.1 None

9.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that:

- a) Homes and Communities Committee note the contents of this report, and;
- b) a further report be presented to members when further information is available in relation to the resumption of the programme.

Reason for Recommendation(s)

To keep members apprised of the current programme.

Background Papers

Nil

For further information please contact Andy Hardy, Health Improvement and Community Relations Manager on 01636 655708

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