

To: <b>YOUTH &amp; EQUALITIES COMMITTEE</b>		Subject: <b>SYRIAN RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMME</b>
From: <b>HEAD OF HOUSING SOLUTIONS</b>		
Date: <b>AUGUST 2016</b>	Ref: JS/	

**1. Purpose of the Report**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on progress with the resettlement of the Syrian refugees through the Syrian Resettlement Programme in North Lanarkshire.

**2. Background**

2.1 In support of the Scottish Government's commitment to resettle 2000 refugees from the Syrian conflict over the next five years it was agreed that the North Lanarkshire area would resettle 120 individuals as a proportionate share based on the overall population of the area. To date 79 refugees have arrived in North Lanarkshire through the Syrian Resettlement Programme and have settled in Airdrie, Coatbridge, Bellshill and Motherwell.

2.2 The Syrian Resettlement Programme in North Lanarkshire is supported by a Member Officer Working Group chaired by Councillor Pat O'Rourke and made up of other Council members and representatives from across Council Services and the wider North Lanarkshire Partnership.

**3. Progress**

3.1 Progress with resettlement of refugees is measured through the 'Indicators of Integration' approach and the key indicators are: Housing, Education, Health, Employment and Social Connections. The support team drawn from Housing & Social Work Services are making good progress in developing confidence and making sure the families receive appropriate levels of advice and guidance. There follows an update on the progress of the first group against these key themes.

3.2 **Housing** – Each of the refugee families has signed a Scottish Secure Tenancy providing them with security of tenure which is central to feelings of safety and stability in terms of housing. The Refugees have expressed satisfaction about the quality of housing offered and its location. The support team drawn from Housing & Social Work Services are making good progress in developing confidence and resilience and are making sure the families receive appropriate levels of advice and guidance.

3.3 **Health** – All refugees are registered with local GP practices and have been attending appointments where needs have arisen. One of the emerging needs is mental health and all adults are being offered support through a number of pathways including through GP's, direct referral by Health Visitors and referral into more specialist support services for those suffering from past trauma. Other issues include dental health and optician services and the support team are working to ensure appropriate treatment is accessible for all the

families. All individuals with more serious health conditions have been referred to appropriate specialists.

3.4 **Education** – Of the children who arrived in November and January 2016 all are now in schools and nurseries in their local areas. The children have made excellent progress in the two terms they have been attending. The children who arrived in June/July 2016 as part of the second group who have been resettled in Motherwell and Bellshill are being assessed by Child Psychology over the summer holidays and will be ready to start school at the beginning of the new term in August.

3.5 **ESOL** - Major progress has also been made in the provision of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Community Learning and Development (CLD) have been providing 3 morning sessions of 2 hours to the Coatbridge based refugees and 3 afternoon sessions of 2 hours to the Airdrie based refugees. The learners are making exceptional progress and the sessions are being adjusted to allow those who are progressing faster to maintain that momentum. The plan is to move towards language associated with employment and helping them build an English language C.V. The group learns at different speeds so a range of levels are emerging, but all are motivated to learn and their attendance is very positive. The feedback from the group is that they are very much enjoying the sessions and find them extremely useful.

ESOL classes started within days of arrival for the Motherwell/Bellshill group and they are also approaching the classes with great enthusiasm. It is intended that ESOL will be delivered in Motherwell and Bellshill in the same way as in Airdrie and Coatbridge.

Whilst the CLD Service is providing the ESOL input they are also working with volunteer befrienders from the community who had expressed a desire to help with the ESOL groups. Volunteers have been matched with learners to enable them to practice their English, this is particularly important for the single adults, as their opportunities to practice are more limited. This process is also helping with local orientation and integration into the local community.

Senior Officials from the Home Office attended one of the ESOL classes in Airdrie recently. This gave them the opportunity to observe progress and speak to the families directly about their experiences of living in North Lanarkshire. The event was very successful and the Home Office officials intimated that they would be looking to use the work going on around ESOL in North Lanarkshire as an example of best practice across the UK.

3.6 **Employment** – The Councils Employability team and employment intermediary Routes to Work are beginning to make arrangements to talk to the refugees about future employment opportunities. Initially this will be arranged around ESOL classes. Skills Development Scotland has already had some input with the refugees at the ESOL classes.

3.7 **Social Connections** – Members of the refugee group are beginning to develop the social connections that are so vital to integrating into local communities. The establishment of an Integration Sub-group is an important development as it brings together a number of key community organisations who are working in partnership and have developed a local befriending network. A group of around 30 individuals agreed to become befrienders and now working with the families. The development of a Refugee Community Organisation is also being worked on and many of the refugees in Coatbridge and Airdrie have become

part of other local community organisations – for example, the ‘Culture Café’ group in Airdrie.

- 3.8 **Other issues** – Family reunion is a major concern for most of the families and they have the right to apply to bring close family members to the UK. This is a complex matter and partners are working with Airdrie Citizens Advice Bureau and Lanarkshire Community Law Centre to provide accurate advice and assistance for the families on this matter.

**Benefit Issues** – Many of the families have experienced difficulties with the benefits system. The support team and the Council’s Financial Inclusion Team are working with DWP to resolve problems with claims for Employment Support Allowance, Tax Credits and Child Benefit.

#### **4. Recommendations**

- 4.1 It is recommended that the Youth & Equalities Committee:

- (i) note the progress made with the Syrian Resettlement Programme in North Lanarkshire.

**Elaine McHugh**

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