

SUBJECT:	Update on the Syrian Resettlement Programme
MEETING:	COUNCIL
DATE:	16th June 2016
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:	All

1. PURPOSE:

To provide Members with an update as to the arrangements for Monmouthshire County Council's participation in the Home Office's Syrian Resettlement Programme.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that Council: notes the progress made in preparing for the arrival of the first arrivals from Syria in the summer of 2016; and that the Member / Officer working group continues to oversee the arrangements for their arrival.

3. KEY ISSUES:

The Member / Officer Group [from herein 'the working group'] has met three times to discuss the arrangements for the arrival of the Syrians under the UK Government Syrian Resettlement Programme.

In order to effectively and efficiently plan for arrivals of Syrian families into the south Wales area the Home Office have chartered transport to arrive in Cardiff this summer.

Monmouthshire County Council has previously advised the Home Office of our intention to receive 20 families over the life time of the scheme. This summer will see the arrival of the first three families.

Housing

The key issue for Monmouthshire's participation in this scheme is the availability of suitable housing for the families. Through close working with our colleagues in both Monmouthshire Housing Association and Melin Homes we have been able to secure suitable properties. Due to the scarcity of suitable properties in Monmouthshire we have only been able to secure properties when they become available which has meant that we have not been able to be prescriptive over the placement of the families. This was an area of concern for some members of the working group although further discussions with both the Community Cohesion Officer and David Phillips suggested that these concerns could be overstated.

Education

Working with colleagues from the Children and Young People's Directorate (CYP) we have worked to identify where there are school places. This is a situation that requires attention on a regular basis given changing school rolls but at the moment schools in the area of potential resettlement have adequate places to accommodate the children from September 2016.

Medical Support

Prior to arrival in the United Kingdom all individuals being placed under the scheme are subject to medical screening and approval by the Deputy Medical Director of the relevant NHS body. We are working closely with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) to ensure that any special requirements can be fulfilled.

Integration Support

All of the individuals resettled under the scheme have been assessed as vulnerable by the United Nations. They are displaced from their country of origin and in settling in Wales will be experiencing a very different life to the one that they have experienced to date. We are currently commissioning support from a specialist provider to ensure that integration and orientation support that they require is in place. Members of the working group have been keen to ensure that we learn lessons from both those authorities that participated in Phase 1 of the scheme (prior to Christmas 2015) and those areas that have been identified dispersal areas for the longer term. Officers are liaising with colleagues in the local government and third sectors to ensure that the provision is as broad and supportive as it needs to be.

There have been discussions with ESOL teachers about the provision of intensive English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and we will continue to review how this provision is best made. Working with colleagues in CYP we will liaise with our Gwent wide in school support services but are hopeful that the families' arrival prior to the summer holiday will allow for greater assimilation and language acquisition prior to the children starting school.

Religious considerations

The proximity of suitable religious facilities was, and remains to be a concern for the working group. There is a Mosque in Blaenau Gwent and there are several in Newport all of which are accessible via public transport. This will remain an area where we have to give support to the families and will work with our commissioned orientation provider to understand the risks associated with this.

Partner agencies

All of our partner agencies have worked closely with the County Council throughout the planning stages. The clear role in assessment by ABUHB is just one part of the wider support of partners. The housing association have played a critical role in sourcing suitable accommodation. Gwent Police have also been involved in the planning process. The arrivals are all security cleared prior to arrival in the UK but we have kept in close contact with the police throughout. Upon arrival the families will all have the opportunity to

access the POLICESOL orientation scheme. The relationship that these families might have had with the law enforcement agencies in their countries of origin will be very different to the policing by consent model that is deployed in the UK. Gwent Police will provide face to face briefings as to the role and function of policing in Wales today.

Volunteer Support

From the outset the public in Monmouthshire have been vocal about their desire to support people displaced by the conflict in Syria. The offers of support have continued to arrive and range from ESOL provision to counselling services. The working group has agreed that the Partnership Team will act as a point of coordination for all public offers of support to the new arrivals. It also agreed that it would seek to arrange a shared training programme between Owen Wilce, Programme Lead at a County that Serves, and Shereen Williams, Community Cohesion Officer for any volunteers who wanted to work with the families as they arrive.

Emerging risks

Whilst the Council has been committed to participation in the Syrian Resettlement Scheme there are risks associated with participation in the programme. The working group has worked to ensure that arrangements mitigate the key risks such as suitability of housing and educational arrangements. However, there are some wider societal issues that are less easy to mitigate and will require consideration and attention prior to the families' arrival. Given the likely settlement of the families in one town we are minded to undertake some community engagement prior to arrival along with partner agencies to inform them of the arrivals. We will, of course, work closely with the relevant ward members too.

4. REASONS:

Council agreed in September 2015 to participate in the Syrian Resettlement Scheme and this is the first opportunity we have had to receive Syrian families in the formalised scheme. Officers and members have worked to ensure that Monmouthshire is able to fulfil its commitment that it made in agreeing to participate.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

The costs associated with the resettlement are met by the UK government.

6. WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS IMPLICATIONS (INCORPORATING EQUALITIES, SUSTAINABILITY, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING)

There are a number of equalities and safeguarding issues concerning the safe resettlement of the Syrian families. These are captured in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Impact Assessment.

7. CONSULTEES:

Senior Leadership Team
Cabinet

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

9. AUTHOR:
Will McLean

10. CONTACT DETAILS:

Phone: 07834435934
E-mail: willmclean@monmouthshire.gov.uk