

Cheshire East Council

Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 11 April 2017

Report of: Mark Palethorpe – Strategic Director of Adult Social Care & Health
Nigel Moorhouse - Director of Children's Social Care

Subject/Title: Syrian Vulnerable Person Relocation (SVPR) & Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) Update

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Paul Bates (Communities and Health)
Cllr Liz Durham (responsible for Children and Families)

1. Report Summary

- 1.1. This is an update report on the significant work carried out by the Council and our partners to welcome refugee families under the Syrian Vulnerable Person Relocation (SPVR) programme and the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) programme.
- 1.2. We welcomed our first refugee family in January 2017. Our second family arrives in March 2017 and three further families in April 2017. This demonstrates the Council's commitment to fulfilling the agreed recommendation on 13 September 2016 to welcome up to 3-5 families as part of SPVR.
- 1.3. The work that has been done in preparation for the families arriving has been phenomenal in terms of the commitment from Council staff, partner agencies and the local community, in particular the faith community. We recognise that this is the very start of their new lives here and we are sensitive to the fact that we must be ready to provide the necessary support that is needed as and when it is required.
- 1.4. In relation to UASC, we have transferred three groups of young people into the Council's care in June, October and December of 2016 and now have responsibility for 20 young people in total, either as Looked After Children or Care-Leavers. We are particularly grateful to one of our 16+ accommodation providers whose staff have repeatedly demonstrated their flexibility and commitment to assisting us in meeting the needs of this group of young people. As a result, young people who have endured extraordinary life experiences in their journeys to this country have been fully supported in settling into their new lives in Cheshire East.

- 1.5. We have governance established for this Council's work in these areas. Strategic responsibility sits with the Head of Communities for SVPR and with the Director of Children's Social Care for UASC. We have a Multi-Agency Group established that oversees all refugee programme delivery in our borough, and SVPR Co-ordination Group has been established to manage the co-ordinated delivery of the SVPR programme. A Finance Governance Group for the SVPR programme has also been established.

2. Recommendation

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1. Note the contents of this report and endorse the actions that have already taken place regarding UASC and SVPR.
- 2.2. Authorise that further requests of assistance from either the Home Office or the NW Strategic Migration Partnership are responded to appropriately having given due regard to the wider demands on services, the allocation of resources and the overall regional picture, by the respective officer leads – Strategic Director of Adult Social Care and Health and Director of Children's Social Care for UASC in conjunction with the Cabinet Members for Communities, Health and Children and Families.
- 2.3. That the work of partners especially the faith community and local providers of UASC support is recognised and appreciated by the Council.

3. Other Options Considered

- 3.1. Cabinet confirmed agreement that Cheshire East Council would receive 3-5 SVPR families at their meeting on 13 September 2016. The Multi Agency Group agreed to prepare to receive two families initially, to ensure we were collectively prepared to support these vulnerable families. This group then determined that the further families could best be received soon after the initial arrivals, as all the appropriate support arrangements were effectively established.
- 3.2. Cabinet confirmed agreement that Cheshire East Council would receive a further three unaccompanied children who were currently accommodated with Kent Council in this financial year, taking account of the learning from our previous support and current looked after children and care leavers. This further transfer took place in October as outlined below (section 5.3.1), as did the settlement of two young people under the Lord Dubs amendment in December.
- 3.3. This update report focuses on Cabinet decision implementation, and therefore no further options have been considered.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1. To provide an update to Cabinet on the latest position and to recognise the ongoing significant partnership working and commitment.

5. Background/Chronology

5.1 SVPR Preparation:

- 5.1.1 A contract with 'Refugees Welcome' to provide pre arrival and post arrival voluntary support to the SVPR programme, with Care4CE, Mental Health Reablement providing the Case Work support, has been established for an initial 12 months. The Partnerships & Communities team are monitoring these arrangements.
- 5.1.2 Housing Agreements between the Council and the Private (faith sector sourced Landlords) and a Social Landlord providing homes for the identified families has been put in place, and Strategic Housing are monitoring these agreements.
- 5.1.3 A family and professionals 'Welcome Pack' developed with 'Refugees Welcome' has been completed and translation of these documents and other key documents has been undertaken. The families have greatly valued this as a resource.
- 5.1.4 Translation and Interpretation service provision has been sourced with the support of the Procurement team.
- 5.1.5 Transport arrangements from the airport to the families new homes have been sourced.
- 5.1.6 School arrangements have been discussed with families and are in place.
- 5.1.7 We have modelled the Home Office grant income for this programme, and we have controls in place to monitor the expenditure incurred.
- 5.1.8 We continue to liaise with the Home Office and the Regional Strategic Migration Partnership (RSMP) in relation to families' needs as required.
- 5.1.9 We have developed a One Minute Guide on the SVPR Programme, and the Councils website has been updated to provide information on this work:
http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/search.aspx?search_keywords=refugees
- 5.1.10 English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) access has been arranged through Life Long Learning for the families.
- 5.1.11 A Data Sharing Agreement, to confirm partners involved in this work would abide by the Home Office Data Sharing guidance, has been completed.
- 5.1.12 'Refugees Welcome' established a Charitable Incorporated Organisation to be able to trade and hold a Council contract in support of this programmes delivery.

5.1.13 Eastern Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group (ECCCG), and other key partners have worked positively and proactively with the Council on this programme.

5.2 Reflections on first Arrival

5.2.1 Very positive first and subsequent arrival experience has been noted with much commitment and positive support for the family being evident from our own Council services and officers and also from our partners and indeed neighbours and the wider community.

5.3 Reflective Learning for UASC

5.3.1 Throughout the past year or more, the Council has provided a proactive and flexible response to the developing national situation regarding UASC. Activity is coordinated with the Home Office through the NW Regional Strategic Migration Partnership which is administered by our colleagues at Manchester City Council. Depending on the circumstances of the UASC transfer as identified below, the Home Office provides varying levels of funding to Local Authorities which we are accessing as appropriate. We now have responsibility for 20 young people (either as Looked After Children or Care-Leavers) who have arrived under one of the four main routes by which UASC can come into the Council's care:

- As Cabinet had committed in March 2016 of last year, we collected three Syrian boys from our colleagues at Kent County Council under the in-country transfer scheme at the beginning of June 2016. They were initially placed in supported 16+ accommodation whilst they secured their legal status as refugees and attended a local college to develop their English; they have now passed their 18th birthdays, are living independently in the community and being supported by our Personal Advisors as care-leavers. In October, we arranged a second transfer from Kent of two young people from Eritrea and a third from Ethiopia; two of this group were 17 year old girls who have been identified as particularly vulnerable amongst the overall population of asylum seekers.
- In December, we accepted the transfer of two further Eritrean girls who had been brought into the country by the Home Office under the Lord Dubs amendment following the closure of the camps at Calais. Together with the three young people who arrived in October, we are now in the process of settling them to live independently in the community as they turn 18 yrs.
- At any time, we could be asked to take UASC under the Dublin III amendment; these are young people who have been transferred on the basis that they have identified a relative who lives in the area; in these circumstances, we would have to assess the suitability of the family member and either offer ongoing support to them to care for the young person, or find alternative accommodation if the identified person turned out to be unsuitable. Thus far, no cases of this type have been identified for Cheshire East.

- With all the attention that has inevitably been focused on Kent and the closure of the camps, it will be less well known that a steady trickle of UASC have always been able to make it this far independently and are occasionally picked up in the area; we are currently supporting a number of young adults as care-leavers who arrived in this way and a young person that has been placed with a family member.

5.3.2 Inevitably we have learned that when transfers of young people are being arranged at short notice, there are limited opportunities to make detailed plans for their arrival; however, the flexibility and commitment that has been shown both by our own staff and those of our accommodation providers has ensured that every Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child who has arrived in Cheshire East has had a positive experience and been able to settle quickly. Looking ahead, it will be recognised from the regular media coverage of this issue that it is a fast moving situation in which the position can change frequently and suddenly. The Regional Partnership has advised that following the scaling down of the commitment to accept Dubs cases, the focus will potentially shift back towards Kent and the National Transfer Scheme. The extent of our activity thus far has left the Council well placed in the region and able to respond to future requests for assistance as it is appropriate.

6. Wards Affected and Local Ward Members

- 6.1. The resettlement of SVPR families has been in the north of the borough. As you will understand the families we have received are vulnerable due to their experience of the war in Syria and also their experience of living in a refugee camp for a number of years. We hope that families have the privacy and time that they need to settle into their new homes and communities.
- 6.2. UASC who have arrived under the transfer schemes have been accommodated in a single supported accommodation project initially and then settled throughout the borough. In recognition of the vulnerability of any young people in these circumstances, we have chosen not to make their detailed whereabouts public.

7. Implications of Recommendation

7.1. Policy Implications

- 7.1.1. There are no immediate policy implications for consideration.

7.2. Legal Implications

- 7.2.1. The legal implications were reported to Cabinet 13 September 2016. This report set out in full the Council's powers and duties in relation to the SVPR & UASC programme and there are no further immediate legal implications for consideration.

- 7.2.2. Legal Services have supported the development of the Contracts and Agreements for the SVPR programme. These arrangements place obligations on these organisations to assist with the monitoring and reporting mechanisms which are required under the Home Office grant arrangement. This supports the Council's ability to meet the conditions attached to the funding requirements. Should Cabinet wish the SVPR programme to be expanded then contractual arrangements would need review as these are currently for 12 months (3/1/17 to 2/1/18).
- 7.2.3. The local authority will need to be mindful of the provisions of the Immigration Act 2016 that will end asylum support for refused families, limit the availability of Home Office support for refused asylum seekers, and introduce reforms to local authority support provision for destitute families and care leavers who have no immigration status.

7.3. Financial Implications

- 7.3.1. For the SVPR programme there should be no financial implications for the existing Council resources because the programme will be funded entirely from the Home Office SVPR grant. The activities of the programme will be subject to close financial control to ensure there is no requirement to support the programme from Council resources.
- 7.3.2. The SVPR financial governance group has calculated a set of modelled costs for each area of the programme. This exercise confirmed that the objectives of the programme can be met within the fixed resources of the grant. The modelled cost will be used as a draft financial plan by which senior managers can assess and approve expenditure. In addition the governance group has scheduled regular scrutiny meetings with both 'Refugee Welcome' and the internal service leads to monitor expenditure and to ensure compliance with the conditions of the grant.
- 7.3.3. The Council has incurred some small costs in relation to the transfers of UASC as it is clearly not straightforward to collect young people from Kent; we estimate that each of the two trips amounted to approximately £750 including staff salaries. Whilst our main accommodation costs are met by the Home Office there has been a need to make further payments to our accommodation project to ensure that their involvement remains financially viable; however, these costs have subsequently been offset when the young people move into independent accommodation meaning that the overall position is generally contained within the Home Office grant. There has also been an increase in costs for translators and interpreters who are inevitably in high demand across the region and the costs for which are not met by the Home Office.

7.4. Equality Implications

7.4.1. An Equality Impact Assessment is in place and is reviewed by the Multi Agency Group. This provides an active assessment to ensure we consider any unintended consequences for specific characteristic groups through the delivery of these humanitarian programmes.

7.5. Rural Community Implications

7.5.1. From our work to date it is seen as important that accommodation has good access to infrastructure services, and transport routes. Therefore it is considered that accommodation in rural areas may not best suit Syrian families who may need, or want, to travel readily to other areas to connect, to access Mosque and specialist food suppliers. This applies equally to UASC.

7.6. Human Resources Implications

7.6.1. The SVPR programmes delivery is highly dependent on officer time which affects the following areas:- Communities & Partnerships, Public Health, Housing, Children & Families, Care4CE, Procurement, Legal, Media & Communications, Insurance, Transport and Financial services.

7.6.2. Other key partners supporting the SVPR programmes work are as follows: Health (Primary & Secondary Care, Health Care Commissioning, Dentists and Opticians), Schools, Housing Providers, Transport Provider, Translation & Interpretation Provider.

7.7. Public Health Implications

7.7.1. The delivery of these programmes within the borough would have no specific adverse health implications for our population. Eastern Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group is also directly involved in the planning and operational delivery of the SVPR programme.

7.8. Implications for Children and Young People

7.8.1. The children in the SVPR families have accessed education, nursery or child care services as needed.

7.8.2. The initial priorities for UASC arriving in Cheshire East inevitably focus on meeting their primary needs in relation to accommodation and support, securing their immigration status as refugees to give them rights to remain, and enrolling them at local schools/colleges so that they can be supported in learning English. Primary health and dental needs are also addressed, as are cultural requirements around religion and diet. In the longer term, and in recognition of the life experiences that have brought young people into this country as

UASC, there will be a need to give greater consideration to issues around mental health and well-being.

8. Risk Management

8.1. The main areas of risk management relate to:

8.1.1 Ward Cllr Briefings (SVPR)

For each arrival, the Portfolio Holder and the Head of Communities have met with Ward Councillors prior to families arriving, to provide an overview of preparation, arrival information, and support information.

8.1.2 Financial Management SVPR:

Risk of Overspend - As a grant funded programme; there is an inherent risk that a situation could arise where an over-spend needs to be resolved by identifying an alternative source of funds.

Mitigation: Prudent financial modelling & scrutiny of expenditure – A contingency element of uncommitted spend has been built into the financial modelling; this is approximately 20% of the total funding. In addition all modelled costs have been prudently forecasted on worst case basis. Regular expenditure monitoring meetings are scheduled and procedures have been established to ensure effective recording and reporting.

Risk of regulation non-compliance– The Home Office has stipulated certain requirements relating to the grant claims. Failure to comply would risk there being a shortfall in funding.

Mitigation: The funding instruction has been thoroughly reviewed, and procedures are in place to ensure the grant claims are completed accurately and timely.

8.1.3 UASC - The Council's proactive approach in being amongst the first local authorities to respond to requests for assistance from Kent has left us well placed to make decisions about the extent of our future involvement in the various relocation schemes. Currently, it appears that the numbers will not reach the levels that we had originally been asked to anticipate and therefore the demand on social worker, IRO and other Children's Services resources ought to prove manageable. In the longer term however, it will be important to monitor both our ability to provide culturally sensitive services, and the extent to which traumatised young people from various war-torn parts of the world are genuinely able to settle into life in this area. In this respect, the demands on adult services focussing on mental health for example can probably not be estimated with any accuracy at this time.

9. Access to Information/Bibliography

9.1. Cabinet report and discussion 13/9/16:

<http://moderngov.cheshireeast.gov.uk/ecminutes/ieListDocuments.aspx?Clid=241&MId=6103>

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