

# CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL

## CABINET REPORT 7<sup>th</sup> November 2017

**REPORT AUTHOR:** County Councillor Jonathan Wilkinson  
Portfolio Holder for Housing & Countryside Services

**SUBJECT:** Evaluation of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme in Powys

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**REPORT FOR:** Decision

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### 1. Summary

- 1.1. This report provides information about the implementation of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme in Powys (SVPRS), reports on an evaluation of its effectiveness and proposes that the council extends its participation in the scheme to accommodate a further 6 families.

### 2. Background

- 2.1 In October 2015 the Council made a commitment to participate in the SVPRS, a UK Government initiative to accommodate 20,000 refugees from the brutal civil war in Syria. The SVPRS is funded by the Home Office using resources from the UK Governments foreign aid budget. Details of the funding for individuals provided by the Home Office is shown at Appendix 1 & 2.
- 2.2 The Housing Service took the lead for arranging the effective resettlement of the Syrian families into Powys. The Service immediately established a multi-agency working group to co-ordinate effective multi agency working to ensure the success of the families' resettlement into Powys, participants included:
- PCC Housing Service
  - PCC Schools
  - PCC Adult Social Care
  - PCC Children's Services
  - Dyfed Powys Police
  - Department for Work and Pensions
  - Powys Teaching Health Board
  - Public Health Wales
  - PAVO
  - Housing Associations
  - Mid & West Wales Regional Community Cohesion Co-ordinator
- 2.3 The decision was taken to accommodate 12 families, the first 6 families in Ystradgynlais and the remaining 6 families in Newtown. The decision to select each town was based on the relatively lower rate of demand for three bedroom accommodation in each town. In addition Ystradgynlais is close to Swansea and offered an opportunity for the council to make use of services developed in the M4

corridor region to support refugees and asylum seekers. The decision to select Newtown was based on the presence of an Islamic Study Centre in the town.

2.4 The Housing Service secured accommodation for the families (either within its own stock, in the private rented sector or in one case in a housing association property) after consulting with Dyfed Powys Police on the potential risks of placing the families in the identified accommodation and furnished it with basic furniture suitable for the family size, carpets, curtains and all household goods. In addition, the Service commissioned an integration support provider (Swansea based Ethnic Youth Support Team (EYST)) and an organisation to provide English spoken as a foreign language (ESOL) lessons for the adults in the family. A small group comprising Housing, Schools and Powys Teaching Health Board, selected the families referred to Powys by the Home Office, this was mainly based upon availability of places in year groups in local schools. The School Service worked with individual schools to commission additional support for the children moving to Powys.

2.5 The first families arrived in Ystradgynlais in July 2016 and the sixth family arrived in October. The first families arrived in Newtown in early December 2016 and the sixth family arrived in April 2017. The Housing Service commissioned an evaluation of the SVPRS in Powys, which was recently completed by Diverse Cymru, which is attached at Appendix 3. The evaluation shows:

- Overall, the SVPRS run by Powys County Council is viewed as a success by delivery partners, community groups and the Syrian families themselves.
- All the Syrian families reported feeling safe in their homes and neighbourhoods and felt they had progressed in learning English and gaining independence since arriving.
- Delivery partners rated the project's effectiveness and success highly, commending its partnership-based approach and the strength of relationships (formal and informal) between different bodies.

The success of the scheme is also exemplified by the event arranged by the families in Ystradgynlais to say thank you to the community in April 2016 and the hosting of a Syrian Feast at the Newtown Food Festival in early September 2017, by the families from Newtown.

2.6 The evaluation also draws attention to certain issues that the council needs to address, such as:

- Community groups (third sector) felt that communication was a weakness in delivery of the project and one they feel still needs to be addressed.
- Syrian families felt English language provision was inadequate, citing a range of criticisms. The general response was that they wanted to progress faster and further than the current range of ESOL classes allowed. (This has been addressed by the funding of adults at intermediate level ESOL classes to improve their English language skills, in the recognition that this is crucial to enable them to move on with their lives)
- Issues in relation to the delivery of integration support in Ystradgynlais. (It should be noted that these have been caused by short term staffing difficulties)

It should be noted that as a council and partnership we were unexpectedly surprised by the groundswell of support for the families resettled into Ystradgynlais and Newtown, and we gave insufficient thought in our preparations for how third sector and community groups could be actively engaged in our attempts to resettle the families.

### **3. Proposal**

- 3.1. The evaluation of the SVPRS shows that the programme has largely had positive outcomes for:
  - the families who have been able to settle into their new communities with relative ease
  - the children who have been able to re-enter education and are flourishing in our schools
  - the council and its partners, as the programme demonstrates how agencies can collaborate effectively to achieve a common goal
  - Powys and its communities, as it demonstrates the open hearted nature of our communities
- 3.2. It is proposed that based on the success of the SVPRS to date, that Cabinet consider extending the councils participation in the scheme to accepting a further 6 families. It is proposed that these families are accommodated in Llandrindod Wells. This is proposed based on the experience of other local authorities in the Mid and West Wales region who have successfully accommodated families in smaller, more rural communities than Powys, and the relatively lower rate of demand for three bedroom family homes in Llandrindod Wells when compared to other communities.
- 3.3. Should the Cabinet agree to the extension of the scheme to Llandrindod Wells the council will seek to recruit a post to co-ordinate the scheme county wide, providing specific focus on engaging with community and third sector groups, to ensure that their efforts are better incorporated into the partnerships attempts to successfully resettle and integrate the families.

### **4. One Powys Plan**

- 4.1. Extending the SVPRS in Powys to accommodate a further 6 families will demonstrate that Powys supports the UK Governments efforts to accommodate 20,000 refugees from the civil war in Syria and its determination to deliver stronger communities.

### **5. Options Considered/Available**

- 5.1. The Cabinet could consider not extending the scheme to a further 6 families in Llandrindod Wells, and this would not reflect poorly on the council, as it has already achieved its target of accommodating 12 families.

## **6. Preferred Choice and Reasons**

- 6.1. It is proposed that the Cabinet support to the proposal to extend the council's commitment to resettling 18 rather than 12 families, and that these families are resettled in Llandrindod Wells.
- 6.2. The scheme is well funded by the Home Office and by extending the number of families resettled the council is demonstrating its commitment to assisting the UK Government achieve its target of resettling 20,000 Syrians by 2020.

## **7. Sustainability and Environmental Issues/Equalities/Crime and Disorder,/Welsh Language/Other Policies etc**

- 7.1. The scheme is well funded by the Home Office and demonstrates the council's commitment to providing humanitarian relief.

## **8. Children and Young People's Impact Statement - Safeguarding and Wellbeing**

- 8.1. The scheme will enable a further 6 refugee families who are living in desperate circumstances in the nations surrounding Syria to be resettled in Powys, enabling children to restart education.

## **9. Local Member(s)**

- 9.1. This matter has been discussed with the county councillors who represent Llandrindod Wells. Councillor Gary Price (Llandrindod North) states:

"I'm fully aware of the reasons and needs for housing Syrian families within Powys and how those families already living within the County have integrated well with the Communities they live. My only concern is the availability of suitable housing within Llandrindod Wells for an additional 6 families given regular contact from constituents how have been on the Council and registered social housing waiting list for considerable time. It is important that Powys residents already on these waiting lists are not prevented suitable housing from any proposals within the Cabinet report."

## **10. Other Front Line Services**

- 10.1. The resettlement of additional families into Llandrindod Wells will have an impact on local schools, who will see an increase in the number of pupils.

## **11. Support Services (Legal, Finance, HR, ICT, BPU)**

- 10.1 Finance – The Finance Business Partner notes the content of the report and can confirm that the appropriate funding applications are submitted and funding utilised within the grant terms and conditions from the Home Office. If the additional 6 families are resettled, the proposed Co-ordinator post will be funded from the grant.

10.2 Legal - The Professional Lead-Legal notes the recommendation in this report and sees no legal issue of concern

## **12. Local Service Board/Partnerships/Stakeholders etc**

12.1. This matter has been discussed with members of the Powys Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme Working Group.

## **13. Communications**

13.1. We have limited the amount of publicity around the resettlement of the Syrian families, to enable them to pick up their lives on arrival in Powys. This approach will continue should the Cabinet agree to extend the scheme further.

## **14. Statutory Officers**

14.1 The Solicitor to the Council (Monitoring Officer) has commented as follows: "I note the legal comment and have nothing to add to the report".

14.2 The Strategic Director Resources notes the comments made by finance.

## **15. Members' Interests**

The Monitoring Officer is not aware of any specific interests that may arise in relation to this report. If Members have an interest they should declare it at the start of the meeting and complete the relevant notification form.

<b>Recommendation:</b>	<b>Reason for Recommendation:</b>
<b>1. That Cabinet note the progress made to date on the resettlement of the Syrian families in Ystradgynlais and Newtown.</b>	<b>1. To bring to members attention the relative success of the resettlement scheme in Powys.</b>
<b>2. That Cabinet agrees to extend the number of families resettled to Powys from 12 to 18, and that the further 6 families are resettled in Llandrindod Wells.</b>	<b>2. To demonstrate the council's commitment to providing humanitarian relief to Syrian refugees</b>

<b>Relevant Policy (ies):</b>			
<b>Within Policy:</b>	<b>Y</b>	<b>Within Budget:</b>	<b>Y</b>

<b>Relevant Local Member(s):</b>	<b>Cllr Gary Price Cllr Pete Roberts Cllr Jon Williams</b>
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<b>Person(s) To Implement Decision:</b>	<b>Simon Inkson</b>
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<b>Date By When Decision To Be Implemented:</b>	<b>November 2017</b>
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**Background Papers used to prepare Report:**