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Document Title	Syrian Resettlement Programme Update

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Link to a report to Cabinet on 10 March 2020

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REPORT TO: Members' Library Service

MEETING DATE:

BY: Head of Development

SUBJECT: Syrian Resettlement Programme Update

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To update members of progress since East Lothian Council's humanitarian commitment to participate in the Syrian Resettlement Programme in 2015.
- 1.2 To note that the current Syrian Resettlement Programme will end at the end of March 2020 and be subsumed into the new global UK Resettlement Scheme that will commence in April 2020.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Cabinet notes progress made on the Syrian Resettlement Programme to date ahead of its demise and being subsumed into the new global UK Resettlement Scheme.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In October 2015, East Lothian Council responded to an urgent request from the UK Government and COSLA's Strategic Migration Partnership to assist those refugees displaced from Syria. As a result the Council committed to resettle up to seven families per year (equating to an estimate of 30 refugees per year) over a five year period. This target was in excess of the Council's proportion (based on population levels¹) as there was initial concern that not all Councils would be able to assist.
- 3.2 Scotland reached its target of re-housing 2000 Syrian refugees in December 2017, two years into the original five-year resettlement programme, and to date have accepted 20% of all those refugees resettled in the UK against an original commitment of 10%.

¹ East Lothian's population in 2015 was around 1.19% of Scotland's. 1.19% of 2,000 equates to 38 individuals or around ten households.

- 3.3 To date, East Lothian Council has housed 18 households in total, comprising circa 70 individuals who were all given East Lothian Council tenancies except one (which was an East Lothian Housing Association tenancy). This shortfall is for a variety of reasons, not least the housing demand pressure the Council is under and the significant range of other particular needs groups and households that it has a legal duty or policy commitment to rehouse.
- 3.4 Although this has fallen short of the commitment made, it is in the context that at the national level Scotland has significantly exceeded the 2,000 person target it made in 2015 resulting in some Councils withdrawing from the existing scheme.
- 3.5 It is important to note that delivery of this commitment and successful integration of the families has been down to strong partnership working between Housing, Education and Children's Services and Health and Social Care ensuring that arriving families are able to access and benefit from these services on arrival. Voluntary groups such as *East Lothian Welcomes Refugees* have also been instrumental in delivering good outcomes and support for families. As a result of this support these families have integrated well into their new communities.
- 3.6 The Council's Community Housing Service has been working hard with other Council services to ensure robust processes and ongoing support is provided to families so that it is geared up for any commitment the Council might make beyond the expiry of the current scheme.
- 3.7 The Council's excellent work in this area and the successful resettlement and integration of the refugees into East Lothian society was recognised by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) who undertook a good practice visit as part of their training programme in September 2019. The IOM were also accompanied by representatives from COSLA and the Home Office with positive feedback being given by all attendees.
- 3.8 The current scheme concludes in March 2020 and will be replaced by a new UK national global scheme that will broaden the geographical focus of current schemes beyond the Middle East and North Africa with continued funding in place and is the subject of a separate Cabinet report.

4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The re-housing of refugees on a proportionate basis can be established under existing allocations policy and homelessness legislation.

5. INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 An integrated impact assessment (IIA) was undertaken at the commencement of the scheme and also incorporated as part of the IIA for the new Housing Allocations Policy approved by Cabinet in March 2019.

6. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Financial – costs associated with the scheme are met by the Home Office for five years from date of arrival and include additional educational support, tenancy support, void costs, furniture and fittings, English language lessons etc.
- 6.2 Personnel - None
- 6.3 Other - None

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 East Lothian Council Report, 27 October 2015 – Syrian Refugees
https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/5691/east_lothian_council

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