

# People Scrutiny Panel

Meeting Date: 06/10/2022

Portfolio: Communities, Health and Wellbeing

Key Decision: No

Policy and Budget Framework: No

Public / Private: Public

  

Title: Update on Work to Support Refugees and Asylum Seekers from Carlisle Refugee Action Group and Cumbria County Council

Report of: Head of Policy and Communications

Report Number: PC.26/22

## **Purpose / Summary:**

This report presents updates from Carlisle Refugee Action Group and Cumbria County Council on their work in supporting refugees and asylum seekers in Carlisle and Cumbria.

## **Recommendations:**

Members are asked to:

1. Consider and comment on the content of the report and the verbal updates from Carlisle Refugee Action Group and Cumbria County Council.

## **Tracking**

Executive:	
Scrutiny:	<b>People 06/10/22</b>
Council:	

## 1. Background

- 1.1 At their meeting of 09 June 2022, People Panel agreed that they would like an update on the work of Carlisle Refugee Action Group (CRAG). This is provided in appendix 1.
- 1.2 Cumbria County Council lead the local government response on refugee and asylum seeker support in Cumbria. The County Council have provided an overview of their role in appendix 2.
- 1.3 The City Council has a specific role as a partner in the Refugee Resettlement Programme in Cumbria. This role is in liaising with registered providers (housing associations) to secure appropriate accommodation for refugees prior to their arrival in the city. We also support community groups who independently offer accommodation to refugee families. This Refugee Resettlement Programme is distinct from the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and asylum seeker programmes.
- 1.4 It is important to be clear on the definitions of refugees and asylum seekers:

An asylum seeker is someone who has arrived in the country and asked for asylum. While their request (asylum claim) is being considered in a legal process by the Government, they are known as an asylum seeker. During this period, they do not have the same rights as a British Citizen, or a refugee. It is not illegal to seek asylum and the Government has some obligations to people who are seeking asylum, while their claim is being processed. If the Government accepts an asylum claim, then it means that the person has been legally recognised as a refugee.

A refugee is defined in the Refugee Convention (sometimes known as the Geneva Convention), passed by the United Nations in 1951 as a person who: *“owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country;”*

## 2. Recommendations

- 3.1 The Panel are recommended to consider and comment on the content of the report and the verbal updates from Carlisle Refugee Action Group and Cumbria County Council.

### **3. Contribution to the Carlisle Plan Priorities**

3.1. This report supports the Carlisle Plan's priorities by promoting equality of opportunity for all and seeking to improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Carlisle.

**Contact Officer:**            **Rowan Jones**

**Ext:**    **7257**

**Appendices  
attached to report:**

1. Appendix 1 – City Council Presentation by Carlisle Refugee Action Group
2. Cumbria County Council - Update
3. Cumbria county Council - Information about Schemes

**Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government Act 1972 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers:**

- **None**

**CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS:**

LEGAL -

FINANCE –

EQUALITY –

INFORMATION GOVERNANCE –

## **Appendix 1**

### **City Council Presentation by Carlisle Refugee Action Group**

Carlisle Refugee Action Group (CRAG) was formed in 2015 by a group of volunteers who wished to send humanitarian aid to those affected by the Refugee Crisis in Europe. The main aim of the group was to send clothes and shelter items to people in the Calais Jungle, the camp at Dunkirk and surrounding areas in Northern France. Whilst this work has continued, even after the dismantling of the main camps, CRAG now carries out most of its work a lot closer to home.

Since September 2015 the charity Carlisle One World Centre (COWC) has offered administrative and structural support to CRAG. It is one of COWC's biggest projects. In 2017, CRAG and its volunteers started to support the first group of families from Syria under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme when they arrived in the city from refugee camps in Lebanon.

The families have grown in number since that time to 32 and now comprise of men, women and children from Afghanistan, Iraq and Sudan. They are supported in many different ways including regular drop-in sessions and language support, in groups and one to one settings. Women are invited to join the International Women's Group (IWG)'s coffee mornings, trips and swimming sessions, and through a partnership project, PANAHA, which has included yoga and wellbeing sessions. One member from each household is supported with learning to drive and taking their UK licence through an innovative PCC and Arnold Clarke funded project. Families are invited to take part in local repair cafes, clothes swaps, tree planting, art festivals and other initiatives that form part of Carlisle community and cultural life. The vast majority of them have settled well into Carlisle and some are even working for the county council as case workers and interpreters. Meanwhile CRAG has grown in size and employs a part time worker (12 hours p.w.) to work alongside the COWC Development Officer. In 2020 CRAG set up the Carlisle City of Sanctuary Group which supports a network of community organisations to welcome refugees and campaigns for Carlisle and Cumberland to become a City/County of Sanctuary.

In 2022 CRAG has had a particularly busy year. Between March and May staff and volunteers worked alongside the group of international volunteers sorting and sending aid to Poland for those fleeing the crisis in Ukraine. We brought some of our expertise to the process and were delighted to be able to help out in a small way. In May the first Ukrainian families started to arrive in the city and we were able to support them through the PANAHA project for women and other IWG activities.

In April 2022 CRAG personnel were at the frontline in welcoming and supporting the new group of 140 asylum seekers in the city, with up to another 50 more having arrived and left through home office arrangements during that time. These individuals, all men, reside in the Hilltop Hotel on London Road and have been housed in 'contingency accommodation' for

an unknown amount of time. We have secured funding and donations to offer clean, new clothing to new arrivals, stationary and other items, we have organised some English classes/conversation cafes, walks, outings and welcome events such as the Welcome to Your City days in Bitts Park in June and July. We are working closely in partnership with many other voluntary and statutory organisations in supporting all of the refugees, especially the asylum seekers as there is limited statutory funding to help them. New projects include mental health support as that presents particular challenges to refugees and asylum seekers who deal with PTSD, uncertainty and fear of the future.

Finally, CRAG campaigns on key issues such as the Rwanda Policy and specific local and international refugee related campaigns with Amnesty, Care4Calais and other organisations. We work through a range of media to raise general awareness locally about the refugee crisis and to counter common myths that exist. We are in the process of writing to all local schools to offer a series of online and face to face workshops that will be delivered by Cumbria Development Education Centre (CDEC) on the topic and we are happy to deliver talks or assemblies to groups of teachers or students as well as churches and community groups.

Adrienne Gill  
Development Officer  
Carlisle Refugee Group and Carlisle One World Centre

## **Appendix 2**

### **Cumbria County Council Update**

#### **Background - Responding to forced migration programmes**

In December 2016 Cumbria Leadership Board agreed a countywide pledge to resettle 285 refugees in response to an approach from the Home Office to engage in the Syrian programme. The county council agreed to act as lead authority, co-ordinating the response from partners.

At this time the county council also signed up to the Northwest regional agreement to offer support to Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) in response to the Government's National Transfer Scheme.

The county council established a small in-house resettlement team to respond to the Syrian programme (to put in place an implementation plan for the initiative and ensure adequate casework support for families). The Adult Learning team took delivered ESOL provision; and the county council brought together a strategic partnership group to provide co-ordination and oversight and to facilitate a multi agency approach. The police, health, adult learning, DWP, the third sector and district councils are members of the group. Children's services took the lead with the UASC programme (at that time out of county placements were predominantly used).

#### **Current position**

Over time the number of forced migration programmes in operation in Cumbria has grown. A detailed overview of the focus of each scheme is set out in Appendix 3.

There have been multiple changes from government to this area of policy in the last 6-9 months for example the Homes for Ukraine scheme introduced new responsibilities for local authorities and high levels of additional work at short notice.

Other announcements made in the past few months will further extend local authority involvement in these types of migration schemes. These are:

- becoming an "assumed" Asylum Dispersal area (i.e. no ability to veto) – with effect from May 2022
- councils taking on the re-matching role for the Homes for the Ukraine scheme
- 1,000 unaccompanied minors from the Ukraine to be granted visas

There are now 4 asylum contingency hotels in operation in the county. The Home Office and Serco are the lead organisations for these, however local authorities, statutory

partners and the voluntary sector are involved in providing supplementary support for asylum seekers and working with the local communities where the hotels are based. Discussions with local authorities were also initiated in June by Serco and the Home Office about procurement of asylum dispersal accommodation in the county. This will be in addition to the contingency hotels; offering longer term accommodation for people awaiting to hear the outcome of their asylum claim. Numbers of individuals expected to move into the area are not yet known. Nor is it known when this will scheme will commence.

Cumbria is still expected to continue with ongoing resettlement of Afghan evacuees and calls for housing continue to be made by the Home Office; and a change to policy with these schemes has the potential to result in additional families in the NorthWest region presenting as homeless should they refuse offers of accommodation.

The Home Office has called for local authorities to come forward with a pledge for supporting refugees from 2023 onwards (under the United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme). Discussions are underway at present with local authorities across the county to develop a new pledge.

Community Sponsorship groups also continue to work towards bringing families into the county themselves and numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) living in the county and looked after by the county council are increasing.

And finally, in addition to those refugees and asylum seekers who are in the county as a result of these managed schemes, there are other individuals and families who are seeking sanctuary in the county that public services will not be aware of.

## **Operational implications**

Until March 2022, Cumbria's response to the various schemes and asks has been planned, co-ordinated and based around a strong multi agency approach. Collectively partners have been in a strong position to manage arrivals in the county and work with the Home Office and RSMP to deliver the schemes in a controlled way.

However, the recent changes to policy and new schemes means the landscape is changing quickly, and the scale and type of migration we are seeing is different. The volume of arrivals is increasing, there is greater variety of the countries of origin, the schemes are not all managed by local authorities, and there is much less information available about where people are moving to in the area and their needs. This means there less ability for partners to plan and co-ordinate a response in the way we have been used to; and there is less intelligence about where and what needs may arise.

A flexible and responsive approach has been needed in recent months particularly in relation to hotels and Homes for the Ukraine. Partners have had to mobilise and adapt

their operations at pace.

The third sector, voluntary and community groups have and continue to play a critical role with this area of work. They provide refugees, evacuees and asylum seekers with a wide array of support including access to basic supplies, advice and support, networking opportunities and safe places to come together. Their capacity has been stretched enormously with the increase in schemes and new groups have emerged in areas where there has been nothing previously.

### **Longer term combined impacts and cumulative pressures**

As well as responding to the immediate short-term issues, consideration of the longer-term picture is essential and the combined impacts of the various resettlement schemes and spontaneous arrivals. The schemes outlined above relate to forced migration, however it is also important to recognise there is an increase in global migration following Brexit.

The multiple changes have the potential to create significant cumulative pressure on local services, particularly in the context of ongoing Covid-related demand and need related to cost of living issues. The change in demographics also presents a real consideration for how partners work with local communities to promote positive relations and support community cohesion, integration and inclusion.

### **Considerations**

Developing a greater understanding of the health and wellbeing needs of refugees, evacuees and asylum seekers is essential if partners are to respond effectively.

An awareness of cultural differences is also important; and an appreciation of what good community integration looks like. A proactive approach to supporting good relations in communities will be needed and a strong programme of communication that provides information to support awareness raising.

To date the response has relied heavily on partnership working and this will need to continue into the future.



## Appendix 3

### Cumbria County Council - Information about Schemes

<b>Overview of Scheme and Focus</b>
<b>UK Resettlement Scheme (global)</b> Originally the scheme supporting Syrian refugees, now extended to cover all refugees. Scheme provides resettlement of those individuals with refugee status, arrivals are managed through the Home Office.
<b>UASC National Transfer Scheme</b> The safe transfer of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) from the entry authority to the receiving authority. Home Office led.
<b>Afghan Citizen Relocation Scheme (ACRS)</b> Resettlement of those at risk, prioritising those who assisted UK efforts and stood up for values, and the rule of law and vulnerable people. Individuals are classed as evacuees. Home Office led.
<b>Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP)</b> Offers relocation to those who served alongside UK armed forces in Afghanistan, predominantly those employed directly. Individuals are classed as evacuees. Home Office led
<b>Bridging Hotels for Afghans</b> Offers temporary accommodation prior to longer term resettlement for both Afghan schemes. There are no bridging hotels at present in the county. Home Office led
<b>Resettlement of Hong Kong British Nationals</b> Immigration route for British National (Overseas) status holders to come to the UK to live, study and work on a pathway to citizenship. There are currently no individuals on this scheme residing in Cumbria. Home Office led.
<b>Homes for Ukraine</b> Enabling those living in the UK to sponsor a named Ukrainian national or family to live with them. This is managed by local authorities, led by DLUHC.
<b>Family Visa Scheme</b> Allows applicants to join family members, or extend their stay, in the UK. Home Office led. No involvement of local authorities unless individual transfers onto the HfU scheme. No information available about numbers of individuals in Cumbria arrived through this scheme.
<b>Asylum Contingency Accommodation</b> Temporary accommodation in hotels for asylum seekers. Delivered by Serco for Home Office. No formal role for local authorities. 4 hotels in Cumbria. Not voluntary
<b>Asylum dispersal</b> Longer term accommodation in houses/ HMOs for asylum seekers. Delivered by Serco for Home Office. Not voluntary. Local authority to provide feedback on proposed addresses. No accommodation currently procured in Cumbria.
<b>Community sponsorship Scheme</b> Allows local volunteer groups - including charities, faith groups, neighbours and businesses – to sponsor refugee families. No formal involvement of local authorities.
<b><i>Circa 1000 individuals in Cumbria known to local authorities that have arrived through schemes</i></b>