



REPORT TO: POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE ON 27 OCTOBER 2015

SUBJECT: SYRIAN REFUGEES SUPPORT

BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 To homologate the decision to support the community response through the temporary access to a Council van and premises to the 'Moray Support Refugees' group.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section III (A) (3) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to exercise the statutory power of the Council to advance well-being under the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 and para 5.7 of the Council's Scheme of Delegation

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **That the Committee homologate the decision taken to provide access to a Council van and premises in the form of 3 industrial units in Elgin to the 'Moray Supports Refugees' group.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Following discussion with the leader of the Administration and other group Leaders, the Moray Council announced last month that it would play its part with the other 32 Scottish local authorities committed to receiving refugees. A report endorsing Moray's participation in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS) and agreeing to a partnership approach to the management of the refugee scheme was presented to the Board of Moray Community Planning Partnership on the 7th October 2015. It was agreed that this group would establish a steering group and that group would report to the Community planning Board.

- 3.2 Following the Council's publicly stated intention to accept Syrian refugees a public meeting was held in Elgin Town Hall on 27 September 2015 with an attendance of 80 people including Elected Members, Moray's MP and MSP and a number of organisations and individuals.
- 3.3 A new coordinating group calling itself 'Moray Supports Refugees' was formed to respond to the needs of refugees. The group formed a coordinating group and indicated that a major issue for the group was availability of premises to store donations of help for refugees and also transport. Volunteer's homes are filled with donated items and need to be sorted and dispatched. A request was made to the Council for help.
- 3.4 The volunteer effort will play a key role in ensuring community support and helping build cohesion. As well as offering a vital resource in terms of language, clothing, furniture and material resources; the group has a key role in supporting refugees and to assist in changing negative opinions of refugees across the community.
- 3.5 The group now have access to Units 2, 3 and 4 (a total of 75m²) in the Chanonry Business Centre, Elgin; together with a non-exclusive rights to use 3 parking spaces within the car park
- 3.6 The Council have also given access to a van and have provided driving assessments for volunteer drivers; allowing them to drive the Council van and to collect donations.
- 3.7 An internal lease has been created to allow access to the building. However the temporary suspension of rates can only exist for a short timescale.
- 3.8 Discussion has started with the group about the temporary nature of the arrangement. These arrangements have been stressed to the Moray Supports Refugees group and the intention would be to create an entity that could take responsibility for the lease, any changes to the rates and the van.

4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Moray 2023: A Plan for the Future/Service Plan/Health and Social Care Integration

The impact of the introduction of Syrian refugees over the next 5 years will impact on the Moray 2023 Plan. The new citizens of Moray could contribute to a growing, diverse and sustainable community and increasing the population.

In the interests of a safer community, it is important that community cohesion and integration is a crucial part of the Council's approach to handling the refugee situation in Moray.

(b) Policy and Legal

The Council has clear powers to assist refugees in within Moray, for example in meeting housing needs. There are no clear powers to assist refugees out with Moray, however section 20 of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 gives the Council powers to promote or improve the wellbeing of the area. This is commonly known as the Power of Wellbeing and could justify the support of local charitable activity. The support the Council has offered, as set out in this report, is relatively small in scale and proportionate.

(c) Financial implications

The Council cost for the accommodation is as follows:

- The rental for the 3 units: is £10,800 per annum;
- Non Domestic Rates: the rates payable for units 2,3 and 5 for 2015/16 is £3,600*;
- Building insurance cost for the 3 units would be £31 per month;
- Insurance for volunteers is covered by the existing contract;
- Electricity estimated cost for the 3 units of £140 per month;
- Water and Sewerage Charges: No direct water charges currently billed to tenants.

If this property is occupied by a registered Scottish Charity (it must be registered with the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator). In furtherance of its charitable aims, there would be an entitlement to 80% mandatory rates relief (which is the equivalent to £2,880).

There is no charge to the Council for the award of this relief. The Council may make an award of 20% discretionary rates relief top up the rates relief to the full amount of the bill. The cost of any such award will jointly be borne by the National Non-Domestic Rates 'pool' and Moray Councils Tax-payers. The 'pool' would fund 75% of any such award; and the remaining balance would accrue as a financial burden to the Council and would require to be funded directly by Moray's Council Tax-payers. In this instance this would initially be a cost of £180.

Alternatively, if these properties is occupied by an organisation which occupies no other properties in Scotland (for example, a new company or organisation), there will be an entitlement to 100% rates relief under the Small Business Bonus Scheme. This will not require any registration with any external body, merely the creation of the entity and its liability for the payment of rates. There is no cost to the Council in any award under this scheme.

The cost for the Van is as follows:

- Insurance this is covered by the existing Council insurance;
- Driver assessments: £51.50 per person to date that is £103;
- Van Hire: £15 per day;
- No timescale has been agreed with the group at this early stage.

(d) Risk Implications

The risk to the Council is:

- The council is bearing all the risks until the Moray Support Refugees Group has a formalised agreement. Discussions and support amongst partners is continuing into the formation of a constituted group to take on responsibilities for the premises and transport. Until this is formalised, the Council will be bearing the risks to property and any subsequent vehicle damage.
- The arrangements are extended beyond a reasonable period and the costs extended.

(e) Staffing Implications

Currently the Community Planning and Development Manager is coordinating activity around the refugee situation and is meeting regularly with the Moray Supports Refugees group. A number of staff from Estates and Transport has been involved in the arrangements for the van and premises.

(f) Property

An internal lease on a month to month basis for the units 2, 3 and 5 in the Chanonry Business Centre has been made.

(g) Equalities

Support to refugees is covered by the 1950 European Convention of Human rights.

(f) Consultations

The Head of Housing; Head of Financial Services and Head of Legal and Democratic Services have been consulted and are in agreement with the content of this report

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 That in response to the potential arrival of refugees to Moray arrangements have been made to provide access to a Council van and use of Council industrial units premises to allow the Moray Supports Refugees group to collect, sort and store donated goods**

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Background Papers:
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