County Council

Cabinet Member Report

6 October 2016

**Report of the Leader of the Council**

I have been asked to report, by Councillor Brazil on ………….

*……….Syrian Refugee Resettlement and Unaccompanied Asylum-*

*Seeking Children*

**Summary**

The UK Government’s response to the displacement of millions of Syrians and

the migrant crisis in Europe is based on four programmes. Three of these

programmes are active and Devon is responding to all three, aiming to resettle

at least 74 Syrian families over the next 4 years and to be able to be looking

after at least 25 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children by the end of March

2017. The first few families and unaccompanied children have arrived in Devon.

Finding sustainable, affordable housing for families and care placements for

children is a major challenge.

**Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme**

The UK Government’s Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme

(SVPR) aims to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees in the UK between 2015 and

2020. Local authorities volunteer to resettle families by finding sustainable and

affordable housing and registering it with the Government. Devon’s city and

district councils have taken individual decisions on the number of housing offers

they feel able to make. At September 2016, Devon’s councils have pledged to

accommodate at least 74 families. The first few families have arrived and have

been settled in three districts. More arrivals are planned shortly.

Devon has formed a partnership to coordinate the Government-funded

programme. This brings together city and district councils, Devon County

Council, the NHS, Devon and Cornwall Police and partners in the voluntary and

community sector. Devon County Council is coordinating the partnership and

has agreed to be accountable to the Government for the programme funding.

Syrian families are housed in private rented properties that the landlord has

offered or agreed to rent to refugee families. The pace of resettlement therefore

depends on the supply of sustainable and affordable housing from private

landlords. The housing development teams of Devon’s city and district councils

are working to stimulate this supply.

Before housing offers are made, the partnership assesses the potential impact

on resources such as local school places. Families become eligible for

resettlement due to some vulnerability or additional need, which may be

medical, psychological or educational. When families are referred to us by the

Government, Devon carries out a multi-disciplinary assessment of any

additional needs to determine whether and how those needs could be met in

the resettlement location.

**Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children**

Apart from the Syrian Resettlement Programme, the Government has made

commitments to bring unaccompanied children from the Middle East and

Europe to the UK. There are three strands to the government’s commitment and

Devon is playing its part in the actions that are under way.

**1. National Transfer of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children**

The government has asked local authorities to collaborate to take care of the

children and young people who enter the country smuggled in lorries and by

other means. Most of these young people are male teenagers, aged 15-17

years old, from a very wide range of countries across the Middle East and East

Africa. These arrivals are currently concentrated in a small number of local

authorities including Kent, Croydon, and Northamptonshire.

The government has agreed with local authorities across the UK to prioritise a

“national transfer scheme” where the authorities in each region work together to

receive and look after a proportion of all these young people. The scheme came

into operation in July 2016. Devon is part of a coordinated regional response

with all local authorities in the South West to receive children under the scheme.

Devon has already received a small number of children and will continue to do

so as they are referred to us. The scheme focusses on responding to the flow of

arrivals, so there is no simple target number of children. However Devon aims

to be able to look after at least 25 unaccompanied children by the end of March

2017.

Unaccompanied children have a very wide variety of needs. Some will have

seen or experienced terrible things; others may have been in contact with

trafficking gangs and be at risk of falling into the hands of those gangs again.

There will not be a single best way of looking after them. We are working with

existing and potential foster carers, as well as specialised organisations that

have relevant experience and capacity to help. There is a great shortage of this

experience and capacity across the country. We must also strengthen the

capacity of our own staff in specific areas of expertise relevant to

unaccompanied children, such as age assessment and understanding of

asylum processes. We have mapped the existing expertise of staff and we are

building an action plan to strengthen these areas.

As for any child in care, unaccompanied children have full access to universal

services such as health and education. The government provides funding to

local authorities for looking after unaccompanied children. The funding rates

under the national transfer scheme are 20%-30% higher than previous national

rates. However the shortage of placements and the additional needs of

unaccompanied children will put pressure even on the enhanced funding.

**2. Resettlement of Children at Risk**

In April, the government announced a scheme to resettle “Children at risk”. This

scheme aims to receive and support 3,000 people including vulnerable children

who are in the Middle East and North Africa. The government expects that most

of the children brought to the UK under this scheme will arrive with family

members and will be resettled with that family, in a similar way to the Syrian

Resettlement Programme. A minority will be unaccompanied and will be taken

into the care of local authorities through the national transfer scheme.

**3. Resettlement of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children from Greece,**

**Italy and France**

In May, the Government responded to the “Dubs Amendment” to the

Immigration Bill by announcing a scheme to resettle unaccompanied asylum seeking

children from Greece, Italy and France. This scheme refers only to

children who had arrived and been registered in Europe before 20 March 2016.

The government is working on the details though we understand that, at least in

part, the scheme will aim to reunite children with extended family already in the

UK. In its announcement about the scheme, the Government expected the first

arrivals “before the end of the year”.

Councillor John Hart

Leader of the Council