

Wiltshire Council

Council

26 February 2019

Background Briefing Note – Safe Passage Our Turn Campaign

1. In September 2015, the Prime Minister made a commitment for the UK to take 20,000 of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees from neighbouring countries, by 2020. The participation of local councils in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation scheme is voluntary but those that do participate receive funding from the international aid budget to support new arrivals.
2. Within Wiltshire, full council [resolved](#) in September 2015 to:
Participate in the Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme and any other such schemes introduced to support other vulnerable persons seeking refugee status. (emphasis added)
3. Government has subsequently widened the scope of the scheme slightly so that it is not limited to placement of vulnerable Syrian nationals but also refugees of other nationalities displaced from Syria (such as Iraqis who had sought sanctuary in Syria and subsequently have been displaced again following the civil war); as such the scheme is now known as the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). To date, Wiltshire has settled 110 refugees under the VPRS programme. The council has six additional properties in the pipeline and is on course to help 150 by the end of 2019. As at June 2018 the [numbers](#) settled by local authority in the South West under VPRS were as follows:

Bristol	119
Wiltshire	98
Plymouth	70
Cheltenham	48
Gloucester	46
Cornwall	45
Bath & NE Somerset	38
Taunton Deane	37
South Gloucestershire	36
Mendip	31
Stroud	25
South Hams	23
Torbay	22
Exeter	20
Sedgemoor	19
East Devon	18
West Devon	18
North Somerset	17
Teignbridge	17
West Dorset	17
Cotswold	16
South Somerset	12

Forest of Dean	10
Tewkesbury	10
Mid Devon	9
North Dorset	9
Weymouth & Portland	9
Bournemouth	8
Poole	8
North Devon	5
Christchurch	0
East Dorset	0
Isles of Scilly	0
Swindon	0
West Somerset	0

4. Around half the numbers resettled tend to be children. Outcomes for the families settled in Wiltshire have been positive with many going on to gain employment when possible and all supported to learn English and access medical treatment as appropriate. Wiltshire Council has worked closely with local communities in identifying suitable properties and with volunteer befrienders to deliver the scheme.
5. Details of any replacement scheme for the VPRS in 2020 are not yet available. Wiltshire Council has also indicated to the Home Office a willingness to accommodate adult asylum seekers and their families whilst their claims are being heard but to date no placements have been made in the county.
6. Alongside the VPRS, the government has committed to resettling 3,000 vulnerable children and their family members directly from the Middle East and North Africa region by 2020, where it is in their best interest to do so. This scheme is known as the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS). The same financial support is provided to local authorities as under VPRS (for English lessons, basic furnishings, schooling and casework etc). Wiltshire is open to making placements under VCRS when suitable matches can be found. Where VCRS children are unaccompanied, local authorities are offered the same level of funding as for unaccompanied asylum seeking children, in light of the need to find foster care or supported lodgings.
7. Wiltshire is also continuing to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) that arrive in the county in line with its statutory obligations in this area:

Children looked after in Wiltshire at 31 March, who were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) during the year ([DfE UASC statistics](#))

2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
6	6	7	24	38

8. For reference the numbers of UASC supported by other councils in the south west are as follows, as at March 2018:

Number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children March 2018	
Bristol, City of	43
Wiltshire	38
Gloucestershire	34
Swindon	26
Poole	24
Devon	23
Somerset	18
Bournemouth	16
South Gloucestershire	15
Bath and North East Somerset	11
Plymouth	11
North Somerset	10
Dorset	9
Cornwall	x
Torbay	x
Isles of Scilly	0

9. As at February 2019 we are looking after 73 young people in total, of various nationalities. Of these, 53 are children and are in care (s.20 basis) and 20 are supported as care leavers. All but a handful of these children/ young people arrived spontaneously in Wiltshire; they will have been identified by the police as unaccompanied minors or attended one of our offices. The remainder came to live in Wiltshire via the UASC National Transfer Scheme (NTS).
10. The NTS is a voluntary scheme (albeit underpinned by statutory provisions in the Immigration Act 2016) and councils in the South West were among the first to sign up for it. It enables councils that have high levels of UASC numbers (more than 0.07% of the local under 18 population) to apply to transfer additional UASCs to other areas. Wiltshire has a rota system with other councils in the South West to help out these councils (such as Kent and other points of arrival) with their larger numbers. The South West started from a point where some authorities already have a population of UASC and others did not have any, so the initial aim has been to bring all local authorities up to a point of having at least 0.02% to help with a fairer distribution rota going forward.
11. In Wiltshire, 0.07% of our under 18 population would amount to a maximum intake of approximately 70 UASC. It should be clear, however, that the 0.07% figure is not a target for all council areas to achieve – rather a point beyond which referrals can be made elsewhere.
12. Funding for UASCs is more generous than the standard VPRS/ VCRS tariff for accompanied children, recognising it is more expensive to provide foster care; but despite increases of around 20% in 2016 the government has committed to further reviews as many councils say it is still not enough – as noted in a recent ADCS/ LGA [submission](#). Funding for care leavers is also not currently provided; nor to the CCG for appropriate trauma and mental health support.
13. During the passage of the Immigration Act in 2016, section 67 (known as the ‘Dubs amendment’ after Lord Dubs; who was one of the 10,000 children rescued by the kindertransport scheme established after Kristallnacht in 1938) was agreed by the government to ‘*make arrangements to relocate to the United Kingdom and support a specified number of unaccompanied refugee children from other countries in Europe*’. The government stated that the ‘Dubs amendment’ would only apply to those young people who entered Europe on or before 20 March 2016 (the date of the EU-Turkey deal), without requiring family links to the UK. The Government announced it would consult with Local Authorities on their capacity to accept children before specifying a number for the scheme.
14. In October 2016, the first 200 children were brought to the UK from France, as part of the UK’s commitment to take half the unaccompanied children from Calais when the ‘Jungle’ camp was demolished. The Home Office announced on 8 February 2017 that only 350 places had been offered by Local Authorities for children, and that once those were filled the scheme would be closed. In April that year, Ministers announced an extra 130 places had been pledged during the consultation, after an administrative error in the initial figure was identified, bringing the total number of places for children to 480.
15. During 2017, the UK granted asylum or another form of leave to almost 9,000 children; but only a few children were transferred under the Dubs amendment that year, with a handful coming from Greece. On 19 January 2018, the government [announced](#) that the cut-off date of the 20th March 2016 would be brought forward to 18 January 2018, enabling more children to be considered for transfer under the Dubs scheme (from France, Greece and Italy) but without creating a new ‘pull factor’ or incentivising illegal

travel across Europe. The total to be transferred under the Dubs amendment would remain 480; recognising that some of the delays in the remaining children coming here are because the UK is awaiting information from other countries. Existing family reunification provisions also remain in place under EU legislation and are protected within the EU Withdrawal Act. In the meantime, President Macron has reiterated that people already in France and in need of asylum should seek help there.

16. Wiltshire agreed with other councils in the south west that we would respond to any requests for s67 'Dubs' placements as a region. We get lists of children who they are looking to place and these are considered on a case by case basis. If we have a suitable placement available at the time we will offer it. We have offered placements but more suitable matches have been identified and agreed for these children elsewhere in the country. Similar arrangements are in place for the VCRS, which may refer unaccompanied children to us and other participating local authorities via the NTS.
17. The EU Turkey deal of 2016 established a swap policy, which means that for every Syrian returned to Turkey, the EU would take a Syrian refugee from Turkey using UN vulnerability criteria. This was accompanied by significant international aid and a commitment from Turkey to prevent sea crossings. Following the deal the numbers making the crossing to Greece fell significantly from 856,000 in 2015 to 29,700 in 2017 with a comparable drop in numbers of unaccompanied children and the number of deaths at sea. The Greek processing of claims is still slow however which means that of the estimated 3718 UASCs still in the country [711](#) are in reception centres; the European Commission is providing funds to help Greece improve these and clarify and expedite legal processes for all nationalities. In 2018, Spain overtook Italy as the main [arrival](#) point for unaccompanied or separated children in Europe – with 5500 arrivals in Spain; 3536 in Italy (down from 15,000 in 2017) and 1922 in Greece. Nationalities of those crossing to Europe are now largely Moroccan, Guinean, Malian and Afghan.
18. The motion refers to the '[Our Turn](#)' campaign, which is supported by the refugee charity Safe Passage, led by Lord Alf Dubs. The 'Our Turn' campaign is calling for the establishment of a new 'Children at Risk' resettlement scheme to bring 10,000 unaccompanied child refugees to the UK over the next 10 years. The campaign asks for the new scheme to build on and extend the current Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) beyond 2020, with central government providing funding to local authorities that at least equals that allocated under VCRS. In a crucial difference, the new scheme is intended to be open on a longstanding basis to vulnerable children arriving in Europe as well as other regions around the world. To secure this commitment, the 'Our Turn' campaign is asking local authorities to pledge places for vulnerable unaccompanied children for this future scheme (in a similar vein to the consultation on local authority capacity that took place on the original Dubs amendment) and asking the government to remove the 'cap' of 480 children and establish a rolling annual scheme driven by the situation for refugees in Europe. Our Turn make clear that any pledge would be conditional on the government providing appropriate funding.
19. As of February 2019, 850 places (out of an ambition of 10,000) have been pledged by councils to the campaign over the next 10 years, including the following:
 - Bristol 60
 - Surrey 30
 - Kensington and Chelsea 30
 - Barnet 30
 - Dorset 30 (provisional figure pending LGR)
 - Birmingham 80
 - Hammersmith & Fulham 100
 - Islington 100
 - Tower Hamlets 10
 - Leicester 50
 - Perth and Kinross 20
 - Lambeth 20
 - Haringey 30
 - Southend-on-sea 30
 - Brighton and Hove 100
 - Hackney 30
 - Ealing 50

Conclusion

20. Whilst the international situation is uncertain, globally there remains large numbers of refugees and displaced people that are particularly vulnerable as a result of torture, medical needs or who are particularly at risk of exploitation that could benefit from safe passage via a legal, regularised route. As such, participation in any new government schemes replacing VPRS and VCRS in 2020 is consistent with the motion passed by full council in 2015 and supports safe passage for families and children directly from affected areas. Ongoing participation in the National Transfer Scheme will continue to see unaccompanied children arrive in Wiltshire under any government relocation schemes, as capacity allows. Local campaigns can also be continued to address the ongoing shortage of foster carers faced in the county.
21. In summary, in considering any pledge to support the Our Turn campaign and resettle an additional 100 children over ten years (conditional on full funding from government) it is important to bear in mind:
- The difficulty in predicting the number of spontaneous UASC arrivals and consequently our capacity in foster care and supported lodgings;
 - That transfers to Wiltshire under the National Transfer Scheme, Dubs amendment and Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme already take place depending on our capacity.
 - Due consideration needs to be given to a child's ethnicity, cultural and linguistic background when placing a child. There can be significant challenges finding appropriate long-term placements in Wiltshire.
 - The potential impacts on other councils in the south west if we exceeded the National Transfer Scheme's 0.07% threshold as a result of making a pledge to the Our Turn campaign. Transfers to other areas can also cause disruption to children who have begun to settle.
 - The VCRS is currently open to vulnerable minors from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). 'Our Turn' want a new scheme to make this open over the long term to vulnerable unaccompanied children that have arrived in Europe too. However, the government have stated they do not wish to create a pull factor for illegal traffickers or to incentivise illegal travel across Europe (which could increase the risk of more sea crossings and deaths in the Mediterranean).
 - The extant motion passed in 2015 (para 2) already provides a basis for participating in any refugee schemes that are announced by the government and as capacity allows.
 - Support from local campaigners in increasing the number of local foster carers would be welcome.