

**12 Dec 2022**

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**COMMITTEE BRIEFING – HOW THE COUNCIL SUPPORTS REFUGEES AND  
ASYLUM SEEKERS**

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**Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide Committee Members with background information to inform their consideration of the Council's support for refugees and asylum seekers.

**Scope of Scrutiny**

2. When considering the Committee's Work Programme for 2022/23, Members requested to receive a briefing on how the Council works to support asylum seekers and refugees.
3. During the meeting, Members will have the opportunity to explore:
  - How the Council supports local asylum seekers and refugees, including the support systems it manages, and the universal support it offers local refugees or asylum seekers.
  - Funding arrangements provided by central government.
  - If there are any areas of improvement identified by the Council, partners or individuals in receipt of support (particularly in schemes within the Council's management or remit).
  - How the Councils is working in line with Welsh Government policy on this matter (as detailed in point 19 of this report)

- Insight on the work with Welsh Government and the third sector to support individuals, particularly those with little or no recourse to public funds
- Feedback from those in receipt of services
- The considerations for medium and long-term planning.

4. Councillor Julie Sangani (Cabinet Member – Public Health and Equalities) and officers from Performance & Partnerships will be available to answer Members' questions and facilitate their consideration. The following have also been invited to the meeting to contribute to discussions:

- An individual in receipt of support to provide their lived experience
- Oasis Cardiff
- Welsh Refugee Council
- Women Seeking Sanctuary Advocacy Group

5. The briefing will begin with officers delivering the presentation attached at **Appendix A**. After which, the externals will be invited to introduce themselves and provide a brief overview of their view on how refugees and asylum seekers are best supported. Or share their experience of the support they have received. An informal question and answer session will then take place between all attendees.

6. Following Committee Members' consideration, they will decide what comments, observations or recommendations they wish to pass on to the Cabinet for their consideration.

### **Background – Definition & Support**

7. The legal definition of asylum seekers and refugee is attached at **Appendix A**. As way of summary, an asylum seeker is someone whose application to live in the UK is being considered, while a refugee is someone whose application has been successful.

8. The [UK government website](#) advises that the following support is provided to those seeking asylum:

- Housing if required  
*Committee Members are advised housing provided to individuals seeking asylum by the Home Office is managed in Wales by the Provider, Clear Spring Homes.*
- £40.85 a week for each person in the household
- Extra payment is also provided for those who may be pregnant, or children under the age of 3.
- Free NHS care<sup>1</sup> including:
  - free prescriptions for medicine
  - free dental care for your teeth
  - free eyesight tests
  - help paying for glasses
- Education, for those aged 5 – 17 (with the reference this may also include access to Free School Meals)

9. The Citizens Advice website states that if refugee status is applied following an asylum claim, the asylum support will stop 28 days after the decision. This means the cash allowance will be stopped and the individual/s will be required to move from the accommodation provided by the Home Office<sup>2</sup>. This means the individual/s would then fall into the mainstream route for seeking houses (e.g., requesting support from local authorities).

10. With refugee status applied, the individual will also receive permission to work in the UK - in any profession and at any skill level. If the individual is not able to work, they can instead claim benefits and will be required to open a bank account and receive a National Insurance number.

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<sup>1</sup> Committee Members are to note the UK Government website notes 'you *may* get free nhs care' [Asylum support: What you'll get - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> Dec 2022

<sup>2</sup> [After you get refugee status - Citizens Advice](#) Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> Dec 2022

11. Further, the Home Office will inform 'Migrant Help' once refugee status is applied. Committee Members are advised Migrant Help is a national charity that can help an individual find housing, claim benefits and make an appointment at the Jobcentre.

## **Background – Legislation & Policy**

12. The UK Government is responsible for asylum policy, which includes:

- asylum application decision making
- the provision of support and accommodation and;
- the operation of refugee resettlement schemes.

13. Although immigration policy is not devolved, the Welsh Government and local authorities play an important role in delivery of support and schemes.

14. The Welsh Government has a policy approach to support refugees and asylum seekers. In 2019, the Welsh Government produced a ['Nation of Sanctuary – Refugee and Asylum Seeker Plan'](#). The aim of the plan is to ensure support is available to asylum seekers and those arriving under resettlement schemes in devolved areas, such as health and education.

15. The Nation of Sanctuary Plan (later referred to in this Cover Report as 'The Plan'), identifies that the following improvements are required within national legislation:

- the standard of accommodation provided
- the financial support individuals receive and;
- the funding provided to Welsh public services to support integration of refugees and asylum seekers.

16. The key purpose of the Plan is to identify actions for Welsh Government, local authorities and voluntary sector to:

- reduce inequalities
- increase access to opportunities and;
- enable better relations between communities

17. The Plan includes commitments to:

- ensure individuals can access physical and mental health services throughout their asylum journey;
- receive information and advice to allow them to integrate into Welsh society from day one;
- ensure access to educational opportunities.
- ensure individuals are properly safeguarded and can access advocacy support

18. Further, the Plan also includes a commitment to:

- continue to fund the advocacy forums in four asylum dispersal areas (of which Cardiff is one) to ensure people seeking sanctuary can discuss issues with their accommodation and other topics.
- a funding commitment to an integration project which will provide holistic support to refugees to enable them to have their needs assessed, access training and reduce barriers to employability.

### **Cardiff Council's Responsibilities**

19. Regarding local authorities, the Plan states Welsh Government will work with local authorities to:

- Ensure there are clear pathways into accommodation during the 'Move on' period<sup>3</sup> - *Committee Members are informed the Council has close partnership working with the Welsh Refugee Council on the matter of sourcing 'move on' accommodation.*
- Support refugees to maintain their accommodation
- Encourage take-up for educational opportunities
- Ensure individuals are made aware of local programmes of support such as the Families First Programme<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> 'Move on Period' relates to when home office accommodation is no longer provided.

<sup>4</sup> 'Families First' is a Welsh Government programme designed to improve outcomes for children, young people and families and places an emphasis on early intervention and prevention.

- Provide adequate support to unaccompanied refugee and asylum-seeking children
- Ensure Council staff are able to safeguard individuals.
- Ensure the provision of high quality, accessible advice, information and advocacy services to enable refugees and asylum seekers to exercise their rights and make informed choices
- Develop a common recording system to capture consistent data in relation to individuals with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) to enable better understanding of the impacts of UK Government immigration legislation and policies.
- Ensure individuals can access the internet in initial accommodation and community facilities

20. With recognition to the legislative context, the key themes of local authority support and responsibility that are identified in **Appendix A** are;

- Employment
- Housing
- Education
- English Language
- Mental Health
- Community Welcome

### **The Pathways to Sanctuary Under the Council's Management**

21. In addition to the Council's responsibilities referenced in **point 19** of this **Cover Report**, the Council is also responsible for:

- Overseeing the delivery of the Ukraine Response schemes and Afghan Resettlement scheme locally
- Supporting individuals who have arrived through pathways such as the Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme / United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme.

22. As detailed in **Appendix A**, the Council receives funding in relation to the above schemes.

23. April 2022 saw the Home Office introduce its 'Full Dispersal' policy meaning all councils in England, Scotland and Wales are asylum dispersal areas, with Cardiff being the 4<sup>th</sup> largest dispersal area in the UK.
24. However, as already detailed in this Cover Report, as asylum seeker support is centralized to UK Government, Cardiff Council, (until this year) did not receive any dedicated funding for asylum-seeker specific support services (unlike the other schemes mentioned above).
25. As highlighted in **Appendix A**, the Council now receives a one-off payment to support service provision and longer-term funding arrangements are currently being reviewed by UK Government, which could enable local government to deliver additional services to this population group. Cardiff is participating in an ongoing cost-tracing exercise to inform the future model.

## **Legal Implications**

The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters there are no direct legal implications. However, legal implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet/ Council will set out any legal implications arising from those recommendations. All decisions taken by or on behalf of the Council must (a) be within the legal powers of the Council; (b) comply with any procedural requirement imposed by law; (c) be within the powers of the body or person exercising powers on behalf of the Council; (d) be undertaken in accordance with the procedural requirements imposed by the Council e.g. Scrutiny Procedure Rules; (e) be fully and properly informed; (f) be properly motivated; (g) be taken having regard to the Council's fiduciary duty to its taxpayers; and (h) be reasonable and proper in all the circumstances.

## **Financial Implications**

The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters there are no direct financial implications at this stage in relation to any of the work programme. However, financial implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet/Council will set out any financial implications arising from those recommendations.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Members are recommended to:

- i) Consider the information in this report, its appendix and the information provided during the meeting and
- ii) Determine whether they would like to make any comments, observations or recommendations to assist the Council with its support for asylum seekers and refugees.

**DAVINA FIORE**

Director, Governance & Legal Services

6 December 2022