

Highland CPP – Chief Officers Group

23 January 2019

Agenda Item	9.
Report No	COG O5/19

Supporting Syrian Refugees into Employment

Report by the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Strategic Partnership

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Summary

To date, 16 Syrian families have been resettled in Highland under the Home Office's Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) with the remainder of Highland's 25–30 family commitment to arrive by the end of 2020. One major challenge being faced by resettlement partners relates to supporting Syrian job seekers into appropriate employment or employability-related activity in line with their existing skills and aspirations. This paper invites CPP partner organisations to discuss making a commitment to supporting Syrian job seekers into employment through an initiative similar to that offered to support Care Leavers (2015).

The object of this discussion is to secure a commitment from CPP partners to ensure that all Syrian job seekers resettled under VPRS are offered employment or job-related training/work experience placements with partner organisations during 2019.

1. Background

- 1.1 The VPRS is a Home Office scheme established in order to resettle the most vulnerable Syrian refugees in the UK on the basis of clearly-defined vulnerability criteria. Families are referred to the scheme by UNHCR field offices in Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey, Jordan and Egypt on the basis of these criteria. All cases referred for resettlement are subject to a two-tiered security clearance process implemented by the UNHCR and Home Office; Syrian refugees entering the UK through VPRS have Refugee Status, 5 years' Leave to Remain and are permitted to work. Local Authorities within the UK were initially invited by the Home Office to make a voluntary commitment to resettle a given number of Syrian families between 2015 and 2020. At the scheme's inception, The Highland Council committed to resettling a total of 25–30 families of which 16 are already residing within Highland, in three resettlement locations: Alness (6), Kinlochleven (2) and Dingwall (8).
- 1.2 An interdisciplinary and multi-agency partnership is currently working with Syrian refugees who have been resettled in Highland. Resettlement partners are experiencing challenges in facilitating and supporting Syrian job seekers' transition into paid employment, or other employability-oriented activity such as voluntary work, work experience placements or job-related training. Having recognised this challenge in the local context, and in cognisance of Scottish national priorities defined in the '[New Scots](#)' strategy, the Highland Syrian Resettlement Strategic Group has identified employability as a key strategic focus of the local resettlement programme and refugee integration

approach.

- 1.3 Given childcare responsibilities and health issues, there are approximately 6-8 individuals actively seeking employment in Alness (arrived May 2016) and 9-10 in Dingwall (arrived Jan 2018). Adults in Kinlochleven who are available for work have all secured part-time employment.

2. Establishment of Employability Working Groups

- 2.1 To complement the work of existing Local Delivery Groups (LDGs), an Employability Working Group (EWG) has been established for Syrian families living in each of the two main resettlement locations, Dingwall and Alness. Partners involved in the EWGs include DWP/Job Centre Plus, third sector/voluntary organisations, Highland Council service providers and the High Life Highland Adult Learning team. The function of these groups is to monitor progress and identify actions to assist Syrian job seekers in moving towards suitable employment. The formation of these groups has been complemented by the implementation of a Skills Audit process, designed to capture and summarise individuals' existing skills and competencies as well as their short- and long-term aspirations.

- 2.2 While this collaborative approach has proven useful in generating ideas for supporting employability initiatives, there are still challenges in terms of securing the commitment of potential employers, voluntary organisations and training providers. Even where Syrian job seekers are actively seeking employment, experience suggests that they are often unable to compete with other candidates in the local labour market. In cases where Syrian nationals have successfully gained employment within Highland, specifically in Kinlochleven, there have been clear corollary benefits for individuals and their families in terms of language acquisition, physical and mental wellbeing, forming social connections and financial security/independence. With these factors in mind it is evident that a concerted effort is required, with the backing of key organisations within the receiving communities, to ensure positive outcomes for Syrian families in terms of employment and their broader integration. We are seeking the support of the CPP partners by requesting that each partner organisation considers making a commitment to assisting Syrian individuals in progressing on their employability journeys.

3. Proposed approach

- 3.1 The Refugee Resettlement team would be interested in further discussing with Community Planning Partners the opportunities and challenges surrounding the support of Syrian refugees into employment with the aim of defining a structure within which commitments/pledges are made by partners to supporting all Syrian job seekers to make realistic and measurable progress towards their employment aspirations with the ultimate objective of all Syrian job seekers securing paid employment by 2020. After having conducted the Skills Audit with job seekers in Dingwall and Alness, and gained their explicit consent to share information with partner organisations, we are in a position to provide specific information regarding individuals in order that they might be matched with the most suitable and relevant partner organisations.
- 3.2 The object of this discussion is to secure a commitment from CPP partners to ensure that all Syrian job seekers resettled under VPRS are offered employment or job-related training/work experience placements with partner organisations during 2019. It is proposed that commitments are made by partners in line with previous work concerning the employment of care-experienced young people

(see **Appendix** below for reference).

4. Recommendation

- 4.1 It is recommended that CPP partners make a firm commitment to ensuring that all Syrian adults currently actively seeking employment in Highland are provided with an employment opportunity or appropriate work-related activity during 2019.

Appendix – CPP Support for Employment of Care Leavers

Excerpts from CPP meeting notes/papers regarding Care Leavers' employability.

Excerpt from Note of Meeting - 26th March 2015

11. Potential breakthrough achievement for the Highland CPP 2015/16

Chief Officers were invited to propose a potential joint achievement for 2015/16 that all partners could collaborate on. It was explained that it should be something remarkable that engaged all partners and made a tangible difference for all or part of the Highlands. The preferred proposal could be developed and presented to the next meeting of the Board on 3 June 2015.

Detailed discussions took place on the following themes:-

- applying tangible outcomes to the Champions Board in terms of employability;
- broadening the scope of the Inverness Response Team model to include other geographical areas and community safety issues;
- growing and supporting the third sector;
- developing a successful model for community engagement/local community planning that was valued by the community; and
- working together and providing funding to enable High Life Highland and partners to expand the preventative work taking place in terms of improving older people's mobility/falls prevention.

In particular, whilst support was expressed for the development of a successful model for community engagement, further discussions were required in terms of describing a measurable outcome that would be a breakthrough achievement. In addition, this had been on the partnership agenda for some time and it was suggested that a further proposal should be taken forward.

In relation to employability, it was proposed that the CPP ensure that every care experienced young person in Highland had at least one job offer from a CPP partner. However, it was highlighted that smaller employers such as HIE could not make such a commitment directly but might be able to support it through their grant/investment conditions and it was suggested that the proposal be widened to include organisations within partners' networks – for example, New Start Highland, ILM and Calman Trust, as well as the private sector. This fitted well with the Wood Commission and the Scottish Government's drive in terms of youth employment. The Champions Board could facilitate to ensure that the outcome was achieved.

Thereafter, the Director of Care and Learning having undertaken to carry out further work on the number, location and age of care experienced young people in Highland, the Group **AGREED** that:-

- i. the proposal that every care experienced young person in Highland have at least one job offer from a CPP partner or an organisation within partners' networks be developed and a report presented to the Board on 3 June 2015; and
- ii. that an item on potential breakthrough achievements be placed on every second COG agenda.

Excerpt from Note of Meeting - 27th May 2015

12. Employment of Care Leavers

There had been circulated Report No COG/17/15 by the Director of Care and Learning providing background information, in relation to the proposal by Chief Officers to offer employment to

Highland's care leavers, either within their own organisation or with partners in their network. There were currently 67 care leavers in Highland, with about 25 new care leavers each year. The Council's Employability Team would assist in the task.

In discussion, the Group was advised that the initiative stemmed from the Partners' corporate parenting legal responsibility. The Lead Professional Social Worker and the Employability team would work with individuals to identify career aspirations and would take account of what each individual could cope with. It would be useful if Partners could identify potential employment opportunities, and provide a named contact person to ensure that care leaver applications were processed through the appropriate channels.

The Group **AGREED** that this matter be raised at the CPB under approval of the March minutes – a separate report was not required.

Excerpt from Note of Meeting – 3rd June 2015

11. Breakthrough Achievement for the Highland CPP 2015/16 – Employment of Care Leavers

The Director of Care and Learning, Highland Council, explained that, at its meeting on 26 March 2015, the Chief Officers' Group had undertaken to collaborate on a breakthrough achievement that not only marked the effectiveness of the CPP but had tangible outcomes. Officers had been keen that it addressed inequalities, as well as having links to the economy and employability. Having considered a number of options, partners had agreed to focus on offering employment to care leavers, either within their own organisations or through their networks. At the Chief Officers' Group on 27 May 2015, officers had considered the size of the challenge and recommitted to it. There were approximately 25 care leavers per year in Highland. At present, the Council was in touch with 67 previous care leavers, only 6 of which were in full-time employment, and this summed up how delivering on the challenge would be a breakthrough achievement. Partners had agreed to identify lead officers and the Council had committed to developing an infrastructure to support the initiative.

Having welcomed the proposed breakthrough achievement, the Board **NOTED** the update.