

**JOINT EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE AND SOCIAL & HEALTH CARE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Date of Meeting	Thursday 29 th June, 2023
Report Subject	Supporting Refugees in Schools
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Education, Welsh Language, Culture and Leisure
Report Author	Chief Officer (Education & Youth)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Flintshire County Council has now welcomed over 150 refugees into its schools via the Ukrainian Sponsorship schemes, the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) and the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS).

This report provides information about the core principles and values adopted by Flintshire when providing educational provision and support for learners along with information about the multi-agency, holistic approach that has been implemented to consider the needs of the whole family. Detail is also provided about the support and training that has been provided for school staff and other professionals to ensure a deeper understanding of the needs to adapt provision appropriately.

The cost of the provision for refugees is currently cost-neutral to the Council due to the availability of Home Office funding under the terms and conditions of the schemes. This is however time limited, and concerns remain regarding the longer term needs of this vulnerable group of learners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Members consider the positive actions undertaken by officers and schools to support the refugee learners and families living in Flintshire.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE SUPPORT FOR REFUGEES IN SCHOOLS
1.01	The UK Government has initiated refugee support schemes over the last few years in response to several international crises. Councils have been required to make provision for families who have sadly been displaced by the instability within their own countries. Flintshire County Council has responded proactively to the requirements placed on it across a number of Portfolios; this report focuses on the provision and support provided in relation to education.
1.02	Flintshire has received families under the Ukrainian Sponsorship schemes, the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) scheme and the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS) in recent years. Information about numbers of learners for each of the schemes is outlined in the sections below. This information has been taken at a point in time, April 2023, as the numbers are regularly changing in response to new arrivals and departures.
1.03	Ukrainian Sponsorship schemes Families entering Wales under this scheme were either accommodated by sponsors or housed initially in hotels. In Flintshire, 4 hotels were used by Welsh Government to support refugees namely the Holiday Inn (Northop Hall), Springfield Hotel (Holywell), The Village Hotel (Ewloe) and The Stamford Gate (Holywell). As of April 2023 there were 84 Ukrainian children in Flintshire aged 3 - 18. Of these, 68 learners are accessing Flintshire mainstream schools across 22 primary settings and 7 secondary settings. There is 1 learner accessing a specialist school and another engaging in early entitlement provision. Four learners are attending schools in other counties and 6 have engaged in post 16 education either in a school 6 th form or local college provision. A further 4 children have recently arrived and are in the admissions process. An additional 8 children and young people have been supported into education but have now returned to Ukraine.
1.04	Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) scheme As of April 2023, there were 29 children and young people from Afghanistan aged 4 - 18 attending mainstream schools across 5 primary settings and 4 secondary settings. The Council has accommodated a further 17 children and young people who have since moved to larger cities (Birmingham) with their families. We are anticipating the arrival of a new family in early June.
1.05	Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS) As of April 2023, there are 19 children who have arrived via the SVPRS attending Flintshire mainstream schools across 6 primary settings and 3 secondary settings. The authority has accommodated a further 6 children, who have relocated out of Flintshire with their families.
1.06	The response from the Council has been guided by a set of core values and principles to ensure that the support and provision offered was

responsive to the plight of the children and families. These are outlined below:

1. Holistic and Person Centred.

Research by psychologists such as Tina Rae indicates that support for the children and young people needed to consider their wider circumstances, individual journeys and the needs of the family. Officers recognised that the educational and lived experiences of each child is unique with some arriving with no English and very little previous schooling, compared with others who have experienced excellent educational opportunities. Similarly, some have experienced significant upheaval and trauma, having lost or become estranged from parents and other close family members, whilst others have had minimal upheaval given the circumstances. All have different personalities, likes, strengths and support needs and as such, there was a recognition that bespoke packages of intervention were required to support families and schools.

2. Multi – Agency.

A multi-agency, collective response was recognised as an essential requirement to address the cultural, housing, social, health, emotional and academic needs of the families and systems have been implemented to facilitate this.

3. Education within the local school.

Considerable discussion was undertaken to establish the best model of support for learners. In some counties (such as Cardiff) bespoke educational packages were implemented within the hotels however, given the spread of hotel accommodation, houses and sponsors across Flintshire it was recognised that the best provision for young people would be within local schools. It was determined that this could be achieved without placing too much additional pressure on any one educational establishment and the approach enabled children to have full access to the curriculum, and the range of social and emotional opportunities our schools provide. The only exception to this was for Ukrainian families who arrived at the hotels during May, June and July 2022. Placing these children into school during the summer term, when accommodation moves were imminent would have placed too much pressure on local schools and would have caused further disruption to the families. These children were offered input from the English as an Additional Language (EAL) team, Forest School and other learning opportunities over the summer months, and all were placed within local schools in September 2022.

4. Knowledgeable, empathetic and trauma informed practitioners.

Training and advice for school staff on a range of topics including the impact of trauma and cultural values was integral to the approach. Examples of training resources are provided in Appendix 1.

5. Continuity of support across accommodation and school moves.

A particular challenge of the Ukrainian schemes has been the unavoidable accommodation moves that the families have experienced. Some have moved twice, from hotel, to sponsor, to private accommodation. Careful consideration has been given to ensuring continuity of support for the children and young people. This has been achieved through the appointment of additional central EAL teachers and support staff who

	<p>support transition. Close working with school transport has enabled children to temporarily remain in schools until new provision is appropriate and available, reducing gaps in education.</p> <p>6. Adaptable and flexible to meet changing need. The needs of the families and the cohort have changed over time and the multi-agency approach has ensured that the support and provision on offer has been able to respond to the presenting needs in a timely manner.</p>
1.07	<p>As indicated, the priority has been to admit and establish learners within educational settings as quickly as possible. To ensure these are appropriate to need, all families access home visits by either caseworkers, the Red Cross or members of the EAL service prior to admission to help ascertain any individual needs. There is further support in admission meetings such as translation services to ensure parents and learners can fully engage in the process. Regular visits to families and communication via WhatsApp have ensured that families were kept informed of developments around matters such as admissions and transport. Support is also offered in other areas such as uniform, free school meals and general understanding of the education system in Wales.</p>
1.08	<p>All schools have responded extremely positively and welcomed learners and families into their school communities. A named member of the EAL service is allocated to each school who provides advisory support, language tuition for pupils where required and a valuable home-school liaison. A range of training packages have been developed and are delivered face to face or on-line for teachers and other professionals who would be supporting the schools/learners. These include information on supporting learners who were new to English along with more cultural information. An e-learning package has been used for the on-line modules which ensures that the information remains live and can be updated as required. Examples of information for professionals and parents is included in Appendix 1. Additional support has also been offered via services such as the Counselling Service, Additional Learning Needs Team, Nurture Outreach and the Education Psychology Service as appropriate. Access to alternative education provision has also been offered where required.</p>
1.09	<p>Support for the whole family has been an important part of the offer in Flintshire. An Emergency Management Response Team (EMRT) led by the Chief Executive was quickly established in response to the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis and weekly meetings were held initially to ensure all relevant internal and external services and agencies were involved in decision making. This model ensured that managers were provided with up-to-date, relevant and timely information. It also facilitated a rapid response to changing need and the ability to address key issues relating to housing, health, education and access to benefits. A separate Education & Youth Response Team was also established which linked to the EMRT. This multi-agency group focused on the wider family needs as well as the individual learner matters which resulted in several additional activities to enable the families to settle into their new environment. These included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play Provision - Support was provided to access the Summer of Fun activities. Specific events were also organised in response to

	<p>cultural need, e.g., Ukrainian Christmas event and play support for Afghan boys.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forest Schools – This was organised by Youth Services and provided an opportunity for families from the same culture to meet and create bonds and friendships. • Summer activities - Community activities delivered via Groundworks for teenagers across various locations in Flintshire during the summer months. • Adult Community Learning - Opportunities for adults to access accreditation, work experience and paid employment. Some of the Ukrainian parents accessed a teaching assistant qualification and are now working to support learners across Flintshire schools.
1.10	<p>There have been a number of challenges for the Council in responding to the refugee schemes. In Education, these involved the need for multiple moves between hotels, hosts and private accommodation. Some of our schools are oversubscribed which resulted in added pressure in relation to the sourcing of placements in some locations. The varying needs of the children and their families has necessitated the implementation of the flexible, person-centred approach as highlighted within the core values and principles outlined in the report which can be time and labour intensive. Despite this, there has been a real sense of success with evidence of true multi-agency working resulting in a positive experience for refugee families and learners in Flintshire. There is a sense of pride around what has been achieved in such a short window of time for these families who due to desperate circumstances, have had to relocate to another country.</p>

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	<p>Home office funding for the schemes has been allocated to the Council based on the number of pupils supported. The impact to Flintshire of the additional educational support provided has so far been cost neutral, though it has taken considerable time from existing staff resources, particularly the Learning Advisor for EAL, Travellers and Children Looked After (CLA) who is the lead officer for this work.</p>
2.02	<p>The funding for SVPRS and ARAP has now ceased for most learners as this was only available for the first 2 years after arrival. Ukrainian funding is only available for one year. The support needs of some learners will continue past the availability of allocated Home Office funding streams, potentially placing additional pressure on central services and additional learning needs (ALN) systems.</p>
2.03	<p>The decision was taken to retain the Home Office funding centrally as opposed to allocating it on a per pupil basis to schools. This follows the model utilised for other vulnerable learners within Flintshire's education services and allows the funding to be targeted at those in most need. This has proved to be an appropriate decision given the level of learner movement between schools and the variable presenting needs. The funding has been used in the following ways:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 additional full time English as an Additional Language teachers (funded until August 2024) • 1 additional refugee support worker (until August 2024) • 4 part time Ukrainian teaching assistants • Additional funding given directly to schools where ALN is identified • Youth Service Forest School family learning • Play provision and cultural events (e.g Ukrainian Christmas) • Transport costs for short term transport needs to ensure continuity in education • Uniform and FSM (until benefits have been agreed) • Access to residential and other educational activities which require parental donation • Bilingual resources <p>All families have been provided with IT equipment under the council's digital strategy. Work with schools has ensured the most appropriate equipment has been provided to meet educational need.</p>
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3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	Impact assessment is not required as the report is for information only.
3.02	The main risk associated with the provision is the time limited Home Office funding which will cease for all refugees in August 2024. It is anticipated that some learners may have ongoing individual needs that require additional support and these will have to be met either through the funding available to schools or central services.

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	None carried out as part of this report.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 - Examples of on-line training and information documents.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	None.

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	Contact Officer: Jeanette Rock Senior Manager Inclusion & Progression Telephone: 01352 704017 E-mail: jeanette.rock@flintshire.gov.uk

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	<p>Ukrainian Sponsorship Schemes: Two schemes were operated namely the Ukrainian Family Scheme and the Homes for Ukraine scheme. The first allowed for people in Ukraine to join a family member in the UK. Under the second scheme, Wales operates as a super sponsor, supporting visa applications and committing to providing accommodation for at least 6 months. Accommodation was offered either by hosts in their own homes or in hotels pending availability of private accommodation.</p> <p>Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) scheme: Support for Afghan citizens who worked for or with the UK Government in Afghanistan in exposed or meaningful roles and may include an offer of relocation to the UK for those deemed eligible by the Ministry of Defence and who are deemed suitable for relocation by the Home Office.</p> <p>The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS): A UK Government-managed refugee resettlement scheme supporting those displaced by the Syrian Civil War.</p>