

**REPORT TO:** Executive Board

**DATE:** 18 January 2024

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Executive Director, Environment & Regeneration

**PORTFOLIO:** Community Safety

**SUBJECT:** Refugee Resettlement Contract – Request for a one-year waiver

**WARDS:** Borough wide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 A Waiver in compliance with Procurement Standing Order 1.14.4 v of part 3 of Procurement Standing Orders is sought. This relates to the Resettlement Contract with Plus Dane which is due to expire 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. A one- year waiver would extend the contract to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 with the existing provider who has established and sustainable relationships with the client group.
- 1.2 Executive Board approval is being sought, in compliance with Procurement Standing Order 1.14.4 v as the estimated value of the contract extension exceeds £100k. The contract value is £183k per annum.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That Executive Board**

- 1) **note the contents of the report; and**
- 2) **approve this request for a one-year waiver to the Resettlement Contract in compliance with Procurement Standing Order 1.14.4 v.**

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The Council has a contract for Resettlement Support for refugees integrating into Halton; the initial contract was awarded for the period 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022. The contract has had two, twelve-month extensions to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, the current contract period is due to come to an end on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. Executive Board approval is being sought for a one-year waiver to provide an extension for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.
- 3.2 The contract was awarded to Plus Dane, to deliver resettlement support to refugees arriving, and up to five years whilst they integrate to life as residents in Halton.
- 3.3 The early days and up to two years tends to be the most intense period of support for resettlement with needs reducing once housing, education, English classes, benefits, and employment matters are addressed. There

is a wider element of the work in building a sense of community and connectedness for this cohort amongst themselves and with Halton's established communities.

- 3.4 Since 2017, Halton has supported 162 refugees to resettle under the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS), the pledge allows for a further 28 individuals to be resettled.
- 3.5 In recent years, Halton's role has increased significantly with refugee cohorts with the Homes for Ukraine scheme; Halton has received 68 individuals under this scheme to date. The contract provider has also supported this cohort. Further arrivals may come to Halton; the scheme doesn't operate on pledges hence, it is difficult to forecast.
- 3.6 Halton also has a significant population of Asylum Seekers in the Borough residing in both dispersed and contingency accommodation. It is mandatory for all Local Authorities to participate in supporting asylum dispersal.
- 3.7 Government have introduced resettlement schemes for Afghan Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP – for family members of ACRS) and Hong Kong Resettlement. There has also been recent government consultation with local authorities seeking to establish pledges for Safe and Legal routes which will incorporate the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS).
- 3.8 The Resettlement Team, provided through the contract, actively supports Halton's diverse cohorts, and responds to the wider population needs beyond the initial commission reflecting the evolving situation in Halton.
- 3.9 Halton has established a multi-agency forum to facilitate joined up approaches, the Resettlement Team, along with the other participating Halton providers and third sector agencies have a key role in the co-ordination and effectiveness of delivery and support to Halton's residents.
- 3.10 A one-year extension period would avoid disruption and provide continuity for the clients. The current provision is adequate and will continue to be performance managed.
- 3.11 This approach would enable Officers to appraise a range of commissioning/delivery options for the future delivery of the service. Dealing with and responding to the needs of the resettlement cohorts generates demand across Council services and Halton's wider system. Appraising future delivery options will enable the Council to consider the best model to optimise the service offer to the benefit of Council wide and Halton services. An options appraisal/business case would be developed setting out proposals by September 2024.

#### **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

None at this stage.

## **5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The estimated cost of the one-year contract extension period is £183k.
- 5.2 The provider is a specialist in delivery of this type of service. Awarding this to the existing provider would support continuity of care for a vulnerable client cohort.

## **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

### **6.1 Children and Young People in Halton**

There are children and families amongst refugee arrivals in Halton. The support with access early years and education provision is imperative to supporting successful integration.

### **6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton**

There is significant learning for refugee arrivals, often language being the biggest barrier. The package of support includes English as a second language (ESOL) from the point of arrival. In Halton, the delivery provides an additional level of pre-ESOL being experienced led from early cohorts that often need more basic level of language support.

There are wider impacts to support employment opportunities, transferable skills, qualification match etc to encourage refugees to join the labour market as soon as possible.

### **6.3 A Healthy Halton**

Accessing health and wellbeing services is key to successful transition. Ensuring support for individuals and families who have most often experienced trauma will impact on how the adjustment is embraced.

There are basic health checks, vaccines and screening which are mobilised to support health outcomes for Halton's new residents.

### **6.4 A Safer Halton**

Changing the diversity of Halton's population and cohorts within neighbourhoods may cause tensions and reluctance to engage. A key part of resettlement is to support and encourage interactions at community level with services and voluntary organisations.

The Resettlement Team focusses on building strong relationships at community level. Cultural events, such as Iftars during Ramadan have become community wide events with attendance from residents of other faiths interacting.

Halton's Church/Christian faith community have become a strong partner in supporting this cohort ensuring beliefs and faith across different cultures hasn't generated a barrier to relationships and integration.

## **6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal**

None identified at this stage.

## **7.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

Approval by Executive Board to proceed with a one-year waiver will ensure continuity of service provision and ensure appropriate action is taken to determine future commissioning options for the service.

## **8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

The cohorts supported through the Resettlement contract is changing the demography in the Borough. Support to integrate with established communities is pivotal in facilitating diverse communities.

## **9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE**

Impacts of climate change such as poor housing standards and energy efficiency often impact the most disadvantaged. Supporting these cohorts ensures suitable housing is sourced to accommodate Halton's new residents.

## **10.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

<b>Document</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>	<b>Contact Officer</b>
Contract for Resettlement	Municipal Building	Nicola Goodwin, Divisional Manager, Community Safety & Protection