



Subject:	Reading Material for Refugee Children
Date:	8 April 2025
Reporting Officer:	Jim Girvan – Operational Director, Neighbourhood Services
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.	
Insert number <input type="checkbox"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Information relating to any individual2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime	
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

No

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To update committee on progress with its May 2024 decision to provide support for reading materials for refugee children in Belfast.
1.2	The benefits to children who read in their own language include improved cognition, literacy, communication, socialisation, attachment and cultural confidence. Parental literacy and prioritisation of reading skills for children can be a barrier to child development.
1.3	Temporary accommodation support, commonly in hotels, before refugees move to more permanent accommodation is no longer provided in Belfast. The duration of hotel stays greatly reduced over the last two years. Temporary accommodation is provided in Causeway Coast and Glens Council area. Access to, and information on, the number of children and their needs is highly regulated due to Safeguarding requirements.
1.4	Working in partnership through a formal agreement with existing service providers will provide the best solution to supporting literacy for refugee children, once they are located in permanent accommodation in Belfast.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	It is recommended that Committee grants approval to Council officers to formalise an agreement with existing service providers, the Book Trust and the Belfast Trust's Family Help Clinic - the Book Trust to build a library of age-appropriate children's books in the most likely needed languages and the Family Help Clinic to distribute materials to families recently located in permanent accommodation in Belfast.
3.0	Main Report
	Number of children living in temporary accommodation in Belfast.
3.1	Temporary accommodation refers to the hotel venues hosting refugee children, their families and other adults on a temporary basis until more appropriate permanent residency arrangements are available. There are no families in temporary residence in Belfast and the contracts with hotels terminate at the end of March 2025.

3.2	<p>Determining an exact number of children, their ages and their reading languages, who were residing in these venues at any point in time has proven to be a very difficult task for three main reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are regulatory challenges in sharing this information by the Home Office and Service Providers. Currently Council cannot access this information. • Children and families are homed at arrival in one of the existing arranged premises (hotels) using criteria of suitability and availability. After a period, refugees are offered permanent accommodation. Previously, due to the high number of refugees and low availability of housing, temporary arrangements extended to several months. Currently, this is not the case and duration of stay for families in temporary accommodation is typically very short. • The reactive nature of arrivals. It is almost impossible in the current context to predict the nationality of children arriving and also the native language. This leads to difficulties in procuring age-appropriate reading materials in their own language in a very short timeframe.
3.3	<p>Officers continue to collaborate with other direct service providers to support children. The Book Trust can provide age-appropriate reading materials in appropriate languages. Belfast Trust's Family Help Clinic supports refugee families with registration for education and health care and have access to information on who is recently placed in permanent accommodation within the city.</p> <p>Literacy needs of refugee children</p>
3.4	<p>Reading in your own language plays a key role in child development, not just at a cognitive level by acquiring the necessary literacy skills needed to communicate, but also social level by the process of developing attachment between children and their carers and developing a sense of cultural confidence in their own backgrounds. During conversations with partners, it was highlighted that while a good idea in principle, parental literacy skills gaps exist where parents might not have sufficient literacy to support children with reading and writing.</p> <p>Parental priorities</p>
3.5	<p>Children arriving to Northern Ireland present a high level of need. Given that the number staying in hotels has significantly reduced in the last year, and the fact that children move quickly to permanent accommodation, the priority of needs change dramatically. Service providers advise that the families identify other needs as more significant than reading materials for their children. Their priorities are consistent with any family with very little</p>

	<p>resources moving to a new empty house. They prioritise Items like clothing, shoes, furniture, kitchen utensils, personal hygiene items, toys, food vouchers, transport vouchers, connectivity and internet etc.</p> <p>Geographical considerations</p>
3.6	<p>The assignment of permanent accommodation is subject to availability. The ability to support literacy in the proposed programme will be impacted primarily by having formal agreements with the Trust and for them to provide materials to support families taking permanent accommodation in Belfast.</p>
3.7	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>Delivery of this project will require funding of £2,000 which is available within existing Departmental estimates.</p>
3.8	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>This report proposes funding a project which is designed to support improved outcomes for under-represented groups, specifically refugee children living in temporary accommodation in Belfast.</p>
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
4.1	None