**1:1 Language Support Service for Refugees – Market Engagement**

**Request for information**

Lancashire County Council wishes to gauge the market's capacity and capability to deliver a new service: the 1:1 Language Support Service for Refugees.

Following engagement with the market and receipt of information relevant to the potential delivery of the proposed service, the County Council may decide to procure a new service.

**Summary of the proposed service**

Since 2016, the Lancashire Refugee Resettlement Programme has resettled over 140 refugee families across Lancashire. The Refugee Integration Team within the County Council supports the integration of these families in a variety of ways, including providing casework support and building infrastructure across the county by commissioning services in four key areas: ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), Health and Wellbeing, Employment and Enterprise and Community Development.

English language acquisition is one of the major barriers to refugee integration. Whilst most areas of Lancashire are within reach of an ESOL provider, such as an FE college, these classes are not always accessible to refugee learners. Moreover, ESOL courses are part-time with limited central government funding, with an average across Lancashire of two to four learning hours offered per week. Most refugees arrive in the UK with very little or no English, and some have limited literacy in their own language. Due to social isolation, some learners do not have the opportunity to practise what they are learning outside the classroom. These factors can make progress slow and challenging.

In addition, some refugee learners of English face barriers to accessing courses in the first instance. Many are parents of young children, meaning that appropriate childcare provision is required in order to attend, and/or classes need to be timetabled around school pick-ups. Structured, formal learning in a classroom is not always the most appropriate path for refugees' language development, especially for those with limited experience of education. Some older refugees, and those facing health barriers, can also find it challenging to commit to and benefit from structured, timetabled classes.

Over the last year, the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for a flexible, individualised approach to English language learning. Some learners have faced barriers to accessing online learning, for instance due to limited digital literacy or children being home from school. The impact of the pandemic has therefore widened the gap between those learners who have been able to adapt to new ways of learning and those who continue to face barriers to doing so. In addition, progress in English has been adversely affected by the limited social interactions resulting from the Covid-19 restrictions.

As a result, we have observed a growing need for one-to-one (1:1) support for refugee learners of English. The 1:1 Language Support Service seeks to address this need by pairing refugee learners of English (Clients) with language support volunteers (Volunteers). Over a period of six months, volunteers will support clients to build the confidence, knowledge and understanding of learning strategies to improve their English language level. They will also support clients to access appropriate ESOL provision and other activities that will help improve their English, such as social clubs or volunteering.

In summary, the Service will:

* Recruit experienced, qualified staff to manage the service, coordinate and recruit volunteers, engage clients and implement effective monitoring, evaluation and policy frameworks
* Engage 75 clients, who are learners of English from the refugee community across Lancashire, over a 12-month period
* Recruit volunteers across Lancashire to be matched with clients – ideally one volunteer per client - to support their language development for a period of six months per client
* Record and monitor sessions between volunteers and clients, and clients' progress in English, adhering to appropriate safeguarding protocols
* Train volunteers in the areas of language support, coaching, mentoring, safeguarding, boundaries and empowering relationships. Some of this training can be accredited if appropriate and budget allows
* Host peer support events for clients and separate events for volunteers to share best practice

**Proposed outline of the intended Service**

* The Service will operate on a county-wide footprint;
* The proposed indicative budget for the service is £100,000 for a 12-month project, subject to renewal for a further 12 months at the same value upon fulfilment of the stated Key Performance Indicators
* We intend the tender application to be published end of Summer 2021
* We intend for the Service to go live early 2022

We would like to know whether the interest, capacity and skills within the market are sufficient to deliver the proposed service to an excellent standard.

The Council reserves the right to amend what is set out in these engagement documents. Any procurement process that may be conducted will only be in accordance with the procurement documents that are published. Please regularly check these pages for the Procurement Process details.

Please note that participation (or non-participation) in this engagement will confer no advantage or disadvantage should commissioners commence the formal procurement process.

**Your views**

Please let us know your views on the proposed service by filling in the below form by **Friday 18th June 2021 5pm.**