

Council
14 October 2015

8. Questions from Councillors

Question from Councillor Rodney Bates to the Leader

"What is the Council going to do to help the UK Government and other agencies in addressing the plight of Syrian refugees?"

Answer from the Leader

You will have received today, by email, an update from the Chief Executive detailing the work of the Surrey Leaders, the Surrey Chief Executives and the various government bodies in relation to the Syrian refugees. A copy of the email is attached.

As stated in the response we are working closely with the Surrey Leaders to establish the support we are able to provide. I have asked the Chief Executive to keep Councillors advised on the progress of this work as it unfolds.

From: Gail Fordham
Sent: 14 October 2015 16:40
To: Councillors
Cc: Jane Sherman
Subject: Syrian Refugees

Dear Members,

You will all, no doubt, be aware of the tremendous efforts being made across both public and private sector organisation's and also through various faith sectors, to assist the Prime Minister's announcement that we all work together to take 20,000 more refugees from Syria during the course of this Parliament.

Since the announcement, many local councils, including Surrey Heath have pledged their support in terms of seeking to establish what they can do to help, turning the pledges for support into more concrete proposals.

The Government, Local Government Association, and SEE Councils have been working on behalf of all local authorities, to put together appropriate protocols, funding streams and effective working practices, to ensure that proper procedures are in place to respond positively to the request, when asked to do so.

Both the Leader and I have been closely involved in Surrey's response which has been coordinated through Surrey Leaders' Group and Surrey Chief Executives and led by Surrey County Council, to avoid duplication of efforts.

As is often the case with calls from humanitarian support, particularly when dealing with vulnerable families and young unaccompanied children, the complexities surrounding their resettlement have to be carefully thought through in terms of safeguarding and appropriate resettlement protocols.

As of 12th October, I have received the first proposals of the resettlement requirements from the Home Office.

As well as pre-arrival proposals which ensure both medical and safe travel arrangements, the post arrival regulations call for housing provision, casework orientation support, and English language provision. It is likely that the borough and district council response will be asked to provide assistance through housing, supporting families, and any special community care needs. The provision of accommodation must meet our local authority standards.

Full funding provision has been announced per family to ensure local authorities are fully supported, and can enter into any appropriate contractual arrangements to support this proposal quickly. The Government has also recognised the need to ensure that local authorities can balance their continued local responsibilities against the needs of Syrian families, and are working hard to ensure we can minimise the impact of this scheme on the local communities we serve in our administrative areas.

The Government team of experts are still building teams to crystallise all the expert thinking around how this will be delivered in practice but in the meantime we are considering ways in which Surrey Heath will respond to the call, particularly bearing in mind that we are non-housing authority.

I have also been overwhelmed by the number of private sector landlords and organisations willing to help us with housing and other requirements. We are therefore establishing effective links with the organisations to be ready for the call.

To be clear too on the support priorities, which are similar to our local priorities, the aim is to support:

- Women and children at risk; and
- People in severe need of medical care; and
- Survivors of torture and violence.

Kind regards
Karen

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