

Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme.

Summary

To agree the number of families the Council will assist under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme

Portfolio - Regulatory

Date Portfolio Holder signed off report: 21st January 2016

Wards Affected: ALL

Recommendation

The Executive is advised to resolve that a provisional undertaking be given to the Home Office to resettle 10 households in Surrey Heath over the next five years under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme for Syrian Nations, subject to the project being deliverable within the funding available.

1. Resource Implications

- 1.1 The funding available from central Government was set out in the spending review and in two-tier authorities will be shared between County and Borough (a breakdown of this funding is at Annex A). Agreement will be formalised with the Home Office and Surrey County Council on the division and payment of funds.
- 1.2 People resettled under the scheme will receive 'Humanitarian Protection' leave to stay for 5 years. This type of leave to stay makes it possible for people to return to Syria – e.g. to assist with rebuilding – or can be extended as a pathway to permanent settlement in the UK.
- 1.3 They will have full recourse to public funds, will be entitled to work and access services in the UK. This means that welfare benefits will cover their living costs, including housing costs through Local Housing Allowance, while they are not working.
- 1.4 The Council can also explore other funding options: internally, from partner agencies and from the third sector both financial and in kind. There may also be individuals or businesses willing and able to assist. The experience in Woking was that they had not anticipated the level of support from the community and are now carrying out some more work to better make use of that assistance for future arrivals.
- 1.5 A guide of the items to be provided for households has been produced which will need to be met through the grant and potentially through charitable donation. Guidance specifically states that luxury goods such as TVs, PCs, etc. should not be provided by the funding although

charitable donation may support any additional help the Council deems appropriate to help integrate families.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 In September 2015 the Government committed to resettling up to 20,000 Syrian refugees in the UK during this Parliament. To achieve this Ministers have expanded an existing [2014] Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme [SVPRS]. A description of the scheme can be found at Annex B.
- 2.2 The expanded scheme sought to resettle 1000 people prior to Christmas 2015 and then a further 19,000 people over the life of the current Parliament.
Success in meeting the offer of 20,000 refugee places depends on the commitment of local authorities throughout the UK to accept refugees and the Government has indicated that they will try and place Syrian refugees equitably across the country.
- 2.3 Selection of refugees coming to the UK will be undertaken by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR]. Around 80% of refugee cases are expected to be straight forward and 20% will have complex needs, such as severe medical needs.
- 2.4 The process is that UNHCR refer cases to the Home Office who check they meet the eligibility criteria and then carry out medical and security checks. Exit visas from the host country and entry visas into the UK are arranged and at the same time the cases are referred to a Local Authority. The Local Authority is asked to accept or reject cases. The referral forms give detail on family make up, age and specific needs. Further detail on any medical needs will follow shortly after via a full medical health assessment report. On accepting a case, local authorities then need to arrange housing, school places etc. In parallel an arrival date is agreed.
- 2.5 Unaccompanied children are not included in the Scheme and anyone wishing to support such children should contact the Fostering Team at Surrey County Council.
- 2.6 The Home Office is keen to see a significantly higher number of South East Authorities coming forward and Surrey County Council has requested local District & Boroughs to pledge to make offers to accept Syrian refugees.
- 2.7 Other Surrey Authorities already known to be involved in the scheme are Woking (12 households per year), Mole Valley (4 households per year), Reigate & Banstead (10 households in total) and Runnymede (10 households in total). This information will be updated at Executive.

- 2.8 A Surrey Group has been formed to coordinate the offer under the VPR scheme which includes all leads from Surrey County Council, health and the participating Boroughs and Districts.
- 2.9 A local partnership will need to be established to develop a resettlement offer to households that draws on the support and services available from local services in all sectors.
- 2.10 There are also a number of best practice tools and organisations specifically dealing with this programme that can assist in designing the local response.
- 2.11 There are a number of decisions to be made including the size and type of households resettled and how services are delivered (in-house or by an external organisation) and this work would be co-ordinated by the Housing Services Manager with a cross-services Team.

3. Options

- 3.1 Options available to the Council are:
- (i) To make no positive offer of help and wait to be 'allocated' households at a later stage in the programme or
 - (ii) To identify an appropriate number and type of households that can be successfully supported to resettle in Surrey Heath.
- 3.2 If the Council waits to be allocated families it could mean dealing with some of the households with greatest needs towards the end of the programme and being given a target number of families, which may raise resource issues. For this reason a proactive approach which allows a greater control in matching households with the support and accommodation available locally is recommended.

4. Proposals

- 4.1 It is proposed that an undertaking be given to resettle 10 households over the next five years.
- 4.2 That with immediate effect officers start to link in with Surrey County Council and those Boroughs and Districts already committed to welcoming families to identify resources and cost implications, that a project Team to be led by the Housing Manager Clive Jinman be set up to develop a local resettlement offer including engaging with local agencies to develop the appropriate local response.

5. Supporting Information

- 5.1 Financial information and a description of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme can be found at Annex A and Annex B respectively along with a Member's briefing at Annex C and a letter to Chief Executives at Annex D.

6. Corporate Objectives And Key Priorities

- 6.1 While there is no specific Corporate Objective or Key Priority for this work the Council, and in turn our residents, are being asked to support a humanitarian programme for vulnerable people and welcome them to a community where they can live happily and healthily, and where they can be supported to contribute to community life.

7. Policy Framework

- 7.1 The work would be undertaken under the Government's Syrian Vulnerable Person Scheme.

8. Risk Management

- 8.1 This piece of work is not to be undertaken lightly as significant planning and resources are required to effectively plan to resettle Syrian households successfully. Signing up to the Surrey VPR Group is essential as well as forming a local multi agency VPR group to develop localised actions and resources.
- 8.2 Risk will be better managed by taking a proactive and planned approach and identifying cases that can be assisted and resettled successfully rather than a reactive response to direct Home Office requests.

9. Equalities Impact

- 9.1 A full equalities impact will be carried out if the Council agrees to participate in the scheme however it is anticipated that there will be no negative impacts for existing residents as new resources and specific funding will be used rather than the redirection of existing resources e.g. it is not anticipated that high demand social housing tenancies would be used to house households.

10. Consultation

- 10.1 Consultation with statutory, voluntary and private sectors partners will be part of the strategy of ensuring the successful resettlement of households.

11. PR And Marketing

- 11.1 Media coverage and political comment often confuse the issues of immigration, asylum and refugees so a clear communication strategy on the Council's participation in the Scheme will need to be developed to avoid negative responses to this humanitarian action and ensure Syrian families are welcomed and supported in the community.

Annexes	Annex A – Funding information Annex B – Scheme description Annex C – SE Member Briefing Annex D – Letter to Chief Execs and Leaders
Background Papers	None
Author/Contact Details	Clive Jinman – Housing and Homelessness Manager Clive.jinman@surreyheath.gov.uk
Head of Service	Jenny Rickard – Executive Head of Regulatory

Consultations, Implications and Issues Addressed

Resources	Required	Consulted
Revenue	✓	
Capital		
Human Resources		
Asset Management		
IT		
Other Issues	Required	Consulted
Corporate Objectives & Key Priorities	✓	
Policy Framework		
Legal		
Governance		
Sustainability		
Risk Management		
Equalities Impact Assessment		
Community Safety		
Human Rights		
Consultation		
P R & Marketing		

Review Date:

Version: