

Member briefing: Syrian refugee update November 2015

1. Government commitment to Syrian refugees

- 1.1 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). Richard Harrington (Home Office) is the lead Minister.
- 1.2 Success in meeting the Government's offer of 20,000 refugee places depends on the commitment of local authorities throughout the UK to make 'pledges' to accept refugees. Delivery of the expanded SVPRS will happen in two stages:
 - Phase One: 1,000 people will be resettled in the UK before Christmas 2015
 - Phase Two: will run for the rest of the lifetime of this Parliament.
- 1.3 Selection of refugees coming to the UK will be undertaken with 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. Each area of the UK will be required to accept all cases referred to it.
- 1.4 People resettled under SVPRS will receive 'Humanitarian Protection' leave to stay for 5 years. They will have full recourse to public funds, will be entitled to work and access services in the UK. This type of leave to stay makes it possible for people to return to Syria – eg to assist with rebuilding – or can be extended as a pathway to permanent settlement in the UK.

2. South East local authority responses

- 2.1 **Phase One:** By 18 November, some 11 South East authorities had indicated willingness to accept a combined total of 120-130 refugees before Christmas. Direct discussions are being held between these local authorities and the Home Office.
- 2.2 **Phase Two:** By 18 November, a total of 22 of the 74 South East authorities had indicated willingness to participate over the remainder of this Parliament, offering places to around 2,550 people in total. The Home Office is seeking proposals for a regional approach to allocating refugees for Phase Two.
- 2.3 The Home Office is keen to see a significantly higher number of South East authorities coming forward for Phase Two as there needs to be substantially more pledges than referrals to enable effective matching. The allocation process will aim to match refugees to places with the facilities to meet differing needs – for example whether there is accommodation for families or single people.
- 2.4 The South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM) continues to provide support and advice for South East local authorities considering pledges to accept refugees. SESPM has also helped coordinate meetings in two-tier areas to support integration between districts and counties. Since September, a county council co-ordination role has developed across the South East, although for Phase One arrivals there is some direct liaison between the Home Office and individual districts.

3. Funding

- 3.1 **First year funding:** Government funding to cover the costs of refugees for the first 12 months have now been confirmed. It will be allocated on a per head basis (see table A below). Costs have been drawn from other resettlement schemes operating in the UK. Funding will cover local authority costs including management of the scheme, housing procurement and any necessary void periods, cultural integration such as English language

provision and social care. Amounts are also specified for education, health and benefits. It is recognised that there may be instances where further discussion is needed and some costs may need to be topped up.

Table A: Agreed first year funding for refugees under the SVPRS

UNIT COST FOR SYRIAN VPR SCHEME					
	Adult Benefit Claimant	Other Adults	Children 5-18	Children 3-4	Children U-3
	£	£	£	£	£
Local authority costs	8,520	8,520	8,520	8,520	8,520
Education	0	0	4,500	2,250	0
Special Educational Needs	0	0	1,000	1,000	0
DWP benefits	12,700	0	0	0	0
Primary medical care	200	200	200	200	200
Secondary medical care	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000
TOTALS	23,420	10,720	16,220	13,970	10,720

3.2 Housing costs in the South East are the most frequently cited barrier to local authority participation in the SVPRS. Although these refugees are entitled to public funds there is often a gap between Local Housing Allowance and market rents. Where this is an issue, local authorities should talk directly to the Home Office.

3.3 **Future years funding:** The Minister has written to local authority chief executives confirming additional funding will be available to assist with costs incurred in future years. Details of future funding are still being worked through, with more information expected after the Government Spending Review in late November. Once future funding is clarified, it is anticipated that South East authorities will be in a better position to confirm pledges to accept refugees.

4. Security checks

4.1 When refugees arrive in the UK they will have been through a thorough two-stage vetting process to ensure we know who is entering the country.

4.2 The Home Office takes security extremely seriously in cases referred to them for resettlement and works closely with the UNHCR who have their own robust identification processes in place. This includes checking biometrics, documentary evidence and interviewing potential refugees.

4.3 Potential refugees are also screened and considered by the Home Office for suitability to enter the UK. This includes further checking of biometric data. The Home Office retains the right to reject individuals on security, war crimes or other grounds, including where there is insufficient information to undertake effective screening.

5. More information

5.1 SESPM is sending regular updates to South East local authority Chief Executives/ Managing Directors and nominated officers. SESPM Manager Roy Millard will be pleased to attend any internal local authority meetings (subject to availability). Contact Roy via:

Email: roymillard@secouncils.gov.uk

Phone: 01304 872186 or 07881 521092.

If councillors wish to join the circulation list for refugee updates, please contact Roy.