

## Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme

### Summary

To request the use of housing association accommodation to help deliver the Council's commitment to provide homes for up to 10 households as part of the Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme

### Portfolio - Regulatory

Date Portfolio Holder signed off report – n/a signed off via Urgent Action

### Wards Affected

### Recommendation

The Executive is advised to note the authority agreed under Urgent Action provisions for the Housing Services Manager to work with Accent to identify suitable accommodation in Accent's local housing stock to accommodate families under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme.

## 1. Resource Implications

- 1.1 There are no direct resource implications for adopting this approach as resettlement is funded by the Home Office.

## 2. Key Issues

- 2.1 On 9<sup>th</sup> February 2016 the Executive agreed to support the Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS) by securing housing for up to 10 families up to 2020.
- 2.2 The commitment was based on securing accommodation with private landlords and that stock held by registered providers would not be used. This approach was taken due to the demand for the housing stock held by registered providers locally and a concern that the use of this limited resource for SVPRS could potentially cause community tension.
- 2.3 To date, no SVPRS families have been resettled in Surrey Heath as it has not been possible to secure private rented accommodation in spite of continuous market engagement with landlords and agents, a Heathscene article, mail outs to community and faith groups and businesses and local radio advertising.
- 2.4 The two barriers to securing accommodation have been affordability and the reluctance of landlords to engage with what they see as an unknown situation.
- 2.5 In terms of affordability, families will be initially on benefits and there are currently no private rented properties available at Local Housing Allowance rates. As at 5<sup>th</sup> March 2018 the average rent for a

three bedroom was £1367 pcm, with the Local Housing Allowance being £913 pcm. While many people in the private sector have to top up rents with other benefits it was felt that too big a gap between LHA and the rent would place an unnecessary additional burden on families resettling and may be a future barrier to securing employment.

- 2.6 Initially it seemed that a contribution from the local Muslim community might be available help bridge the gap between LHA and rent levels. When this was pursued, it was found that their constitution did not allow the money to be spent on rent although it remains available for other support.
- 2.7 Assistance was also sought from a not for profit letting agent. However, they required an open ended bond to take a family which it was not possible to provide.
- 2.8 In respect of the reluctance of private rented sector landlords and agents to take part, this arises from two main concerns. Firstly, that once a property has been offered there is no veto available to landlords when they meet the family. Secondly, for agents, it does not meet their usual model of being able to credit check potential tenants and have a guarantor. In a competitive market there are easier business options than working with the Council assist with delivery of this scheme.
- 2.9 In other areas it is quite often been landlords that have a philanthropic perspective and have wanted to participate that has led to accommodation being secured e.g. Guildford Diocese. This has not occurred in Surrey Heath.

### **3. Options**

- 3.1 The Council has two options available to it:
  - (i) to continue to try and secure accommodation in the private rented sector and not use the local housing association stock; or
  - (ii) whilst continuing to seek private tenancies, to access a small number of housing association homes to meet the commitment to the Scheme.

### **4. Proposals**

- 4.1 It is proposed that the SVPRS be moved forward as follows.
  - a) That the Council work with Accent to identify appropriate homes that can be offered to vulnerable families through the scheme to meet the commitment to housing 10 families.
  - b) That this work focusses on families needing 3 bedroom properties as there is less demand on the Housing Register for this size home than 2 bedrooms. The majority of families in temporary accommodation require two bedrooms so this approach will have the least impact on local need.

- c) That prior to a property being offered to the Home Office the Council, Accent and Police liaise to ensure there is no community reason not to offer the property and the Housing Services Manager ensures that the offer will not prejudice meeting an urgent local need.
- d) That the accommodation is let on an Assured Shorthold Tenancy at an intermediate rent (i.e. it is the equivalent of a private tenancy and is not a 'tenancy for life').
- e) That alongside this the Housing Service continues to look for suitable homes in the private sector.

## **5. Supporting Information**

- 5.1 The Housing Services Manager has met with Rob Mills, Area Director at Accent, who is supportive of this joint work.

## **6. Corporate Objectives And Key Priorities**

- 6.1 This work supports the objective to build and encourage communities where people can live happily and healthily in an environment that the Community is proud to be part of.

## **7. Policy Framework**

- 7.1 The Council has made a commitment to the Home Office to participate in this humanitarian scheme.

<b>Annexes</b>	None
<b>Background Papers</b>	None
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