

ADDENDUM

TITLE OF REPORT: UPDATE ON THE POSITION REGARDING THE PROPOSED RESETTLEMENT OF SYRIAN REFUGEES

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF HOUSING AND PUBLIC PROTECTION
PORTFOLIO HOLDER: COUNCILLOR BERNARD LOVEWELL

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report forms an addendum to the Cabinet item regarding the proposed resettlement of Syrian Refugees.

2. THE UPDATED POSITION

- 2.1 At its meeting on 26 November 2015, the Council agreed:

“That this Council resolves to:

- *express interest, to the Home Office in both the VPR and Gateway programmes, by requesting that 50 refugees be resettled in North Hertfordshire, subject to satisfactory funding arrangements by the Home Office;*
- *encourage North Herts Homes and other housing associations to make properties available to resettle refugees;*
- *help ensure that refugees are welcomed in this area by working with the North Herts Minority Ethnic Forum and all appropriate community and charitable groups.”*

- 2.2 The Chancellor has recently announced that over £460 million of the overseas aid budget will be used by 2019-20 across the statutory sector to assist with first year costs of resettling up to 20,000 of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees. Government will provide around a further £130 million by 2019-20 just to local authorities to contribute to the costs of supporting refugees up to their fifth year, including an ‘extreme cases’ fund that will assist with high cost cases.

- 2.3 The Home Office has released a document entitled ‘Syrian Resettlement Scheme - Funding Process’ which outlines the typical unit costs per refugee, dependant on whether they are a child or an adult. The actual amounts covered will be determined by the ages of the children and whether or not the adults are in receipt of mainstream benefits. These costs also include an amount for the management of the scheme. The Government expects this funding to cover the costs of resettlement; however it has confirmed that it will keep the general level of funding under review.

- 2.4 In terms of resettlement schemes, the Local Government Association has confirmed that the local authority decides when it is ready to receive refugees. The Home Office provides referral forms that give detail on family make up, age and specific needs. The

local authority is asked to accept or reject cases. If authorities want a particular make up of cases, the Home Office have indicated they should state this and they will do their best to match cases. Further detail on any medical needs follows shortly after via a full medical health assessment report. As soon as a local authority has indicated they wish to participate, they will be sent this detailed information. On accepting a case, local authorities then need to arrange housing, school places etc. In parallel an arrival date would be agreed.

- 2.5 In order for the scheme to operate successfully, the resettlement arrangements will need to be finalised prior to the arrival of the refugees. Furthermore, many services will need to be co-ordinated to ensure that all necessary support and advice is available at the appropriate time. These requirements are specified by the Home Office with the key provision of interpreting services throughout the period of resettlement. The 'requirements' also include the initial greeting at the airport and transport to the accommodation, registration with utility companies, provision of a welcome pack of groceries, provision of a cash/clothing allowances whilst a claim for benefits is being processed, advice and support in registering for mainstream benefits and services, registering with local schools, attending Job Centre Plus appointments, registering with a local GP and advice on appropriate mental health services. A support plan should also be put in place for each family for 12 months to facilitate their orientation into their new home/area. Arrangements for the provision of English language classes should be put in place within one month of arrival.
- 2.6 Hertfordshire County Council has confirmed that it will send a representative to any planning meetings with the Home Office and it also wishes to be notified once the household takes up residence, so they are able to offer any necessary educational and social care services.
- 2.7 St Albans District Council has co-ordinated relevant updates on the situation regarding the resettlement of Syrian Refugees through the Hertfordshire Heads of Housing Group. This has included reviewing the practical issues involved with any resettlement scheme and to informally discuss the options for delivery. A further meeting has been scheduled for 16 December 2015, with the majority of local authorities keen to explore the option of a shared solution for the co-ordination of a resettlement scheme and delivery of the Home Office requirements. Should a shared solution be agreed, it is likely the service provider would liaise with community and charitable groups in the local authority area in order to help facilitate integration.
- 2.8 Local registered providers' (formerly known as housing associations) have been approached to ascertain whether they are able to assist with the provision of accommodation and some have indicated they are willing to help. The private rented sector is also an option, although may prove challenging due to market rent levels and difficulties with affordability for benefit reliant households.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That the recommendation, as stated at paragraph 2.1 in the main report, remains unaltered.
- 3.2 That an additional recommendation be added at 2.2:
 - 2.2 *That the Cabinet authorises officers to make the necessary arrangements to accommodate the number of refugees agreed by Council in current and future years, ensuring full cost recovery in line with the Home Office Funding Process.*