

**CABINET**  
**31 OCTOBER 2019**

**PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

**TITLE OD REPORT: THE GOVERNMENT’S REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT SCHEME**

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - REGULATORY

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: COUNCILLOR GARY GRINDAL

COUNCIL PRIORITY: RESPONSIVE AND EFFICIENT

**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The Government has announced arrangements for extending its refugee resettlement programme beyond 2020, when its three largest current resettlement schemes are due to conclude. It is seeking pledges from local authorities to participate in the first year of this new global resettlement scheme.
- 1.2 The Council participated in the current resettlement programme and has successfully fulfilled its commitment to resettle 50 vulnerable Syrian refugees in the district. The full cost of resettlement was met by the Home Office.
- 1.3 The Refugee Council has been appointed by the Council to provide specialist support for refugees resettled under the current programme. Should Cabinet agree the proposals in this report, new commissioning arrangements would need to be initiated to ensure there is adequate support for new arrivals.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

That, subject to the successful appointment of a specialist refugee support provider:

- 2.1. Cabinet resolves to support the Government’s extended refugee resettlement programme; and
- 2.2. Cabinet agrees to resettling ten Syrian refugees in North Hertfordshire in the first year of the new global resettlement scheme and authorises officers to make the necessary arrangements to deliver this commitment.

**3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1. To enable the Council to continue to support the Government’s refugee resettlement programme.
- 3.2. The Council successfully resettled 50 Syrian refugees over a four year period under the current resettlement programme. Committing to resettling ten refugees in the first year of the new global resettlement scheme will represent a similar level of undertaking.

- 3.3. Although the new scheme has an extended global focus, the Council will request Syrian nationals as there is already an established support network to facilitate integration in to the local community.

#### **4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 4.1. The Cabinet could decide against participating in the new global resettlement scheme, or to assist a smaller, or larger, number of refugees. However, by resettling ten Syrian refugees in the first year of the new scheme, it has positively met the Government's request for assistance at a similar annual rate of the previous scheme.

#### **5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS**

- 5.1. Councillor Gary Grindal, the Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health, has been consulted and is supportive of the proposals contained in this report.

#### **6. FORWARD PLAN**

- 6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 6<sup>th</sup> September 2019.

#### **7. BACKGROUND**

- 7.1. The first and largest of the Government's refugee resettlement schemes, the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), was launched in January 2014 in response to the civil war in Syria and the resulting humanitarian crisis. The Scheme provides a route for the most vulnerable Syrian refugees to come to the UK, prioritising survivors of violence and torture, people requiring urgent medical treatment and women and children at risk. The scheme was expanded in September 2015, with a commitment to resettle up to 20,000 refugees from the Syrian region over a five year period. Priority for inclusion in the scheme was also broadened to include children. An accompanying Community Sponsorship Scheme was launched to enable community groups to play a role, if they wished, in welcoming and supporting newly settled refugee families.
- 7.2 The Government has been working closely with local authorities, regional Strategic Migration Partnerships and the voluntary sector to implement its resettlement programme. Local authority participation is on a voluntary basis. At its meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2015, Cabinet resolved that the Council should participate in the VPRS and undertake to resettle 50 Syrian refugees in North Hertfordshire. Seven other Hertfordshire local authorities also undertook to participate in the scheme.
- 7.3 The Council recently fulfilled its commitment under the VPRS. Ten Syrian families (totalling 50 individuals) have been successfully resettled in affordable housing properties provided by settle (formerly North Hertfordshire Homes), Howard Cottage Housing Association and Clarion Housing. All ten families have been housed in Letchworth or Hitchin. The full cost of the resettlement has been met by the Home Office. In addition, the Council has also supported St Mary's Church, Baldock in housing a Syrian family via the Community Sponsorship Scheme.

- 7.4 Under the VPRS, resettled refugees are granted refugee status, meaning that they have five years leave to remain in the UK, the right to work and access public funds and the possibility of applying for family reunion. It is expected that at the end of the five year period, resettled refugees will be eligible to apply for permanent settlement in the UK.
- 7.5 The ten families resettled under the VPRS have integrated well into their local communities and the resettlement process has largely run smoothly. The Council's commitment has been delivered in partnership with many agencies including Hertfordshire County Council, the Health Service, the Refugee Council and Herts Welcomes Refugees (formerly known as Herts Welcomes Syrian Families).

## **8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS**

- 8.1. The VPRS and the other resettlement schemes will be concluding in 2020. In June 2019, the Government announced its ongoing commitment to the resettlement of vulnerable refugees and its intention to consolidate these existing resettlement schemes into a new global resettlement scheme. The Government has written to all local authorities in England to seek their participation. As previously, participation is on a voluntary basis.
- 8.2. Under the new global resettlement scheme, the Government's priority will continue to be to resettle the most vulnerable refugees, identified and referred by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). The geographical focus however will be broadened beyond the Middle East and North Africa region and there will be greater flexibility to swiftly respond to international crises.
- 8.3 In the first year of the new scheme, the UK will aim to resettle in the region of 5,000 of the world's most vulnerable refugees using the same approach of working closely with local authorities, regional Strategic Migration Partnerships and other partners. The first arrivals are expected in Spring 2020.
- 8.4 The Community Sponsorship scheme, which enables community groups to directly welcome and support refugees in the UK, will continue. Refugees resettled under this community-led scheme will be in addition to the Government commitment.
- 8.5 The Home Office have committed to retaining existing funding rates for refugees arriving in the first year of the scheme, meaning a participating local authority will continue to receive the five-year tariff of £20,520 for each refugee with a top-up (for year 1 only) for children aged 3-18 years. Funding and resettlement targets for further years will be determined through future spending rounds.
- 8.6 Following its successful participation in the VPRS, it is proposed that the Council continues to play a role in the resettlement of vulnerable refugees by further participating in the new resettlement scheme. It is proposed that the Council pledges to resettle ten individuals - most probably two families - in the district in the first year of the scheme. This will be on a similar scale to the assistance provided under the VPRS. It is also recommended that Syrian refugees are requested as local support services are already in place.

- 8.7 The Council's commitment under the VPRS was fully delivered within the funding providing by the Home Office. Given that existing funding rates will be retained and that the scale of assistance will be similar, it is anticipated that the cost of the proposed new commitment will also be fully met by the Home Office.
- 8.8 In order to meet its VPRS commitment, the Council sourced housing from registered providers of affordable housing as it was considered to be the most sustainable option for families resettled under the scheme. All ten families settled through the VPRS were housed in three bedroomed properties, which are in relatively lower demand locally compared to properties of other sizes (currently only 11% of households on the Common Housing Register are in need of a three bedroom property). In the three full years since the first of the ten households was accommodated, there have been 261 three bedroom vacancies and the impact on supply is not considered significant. The private rented sector also remains an option although it is potentially less viable for benefit reliant households due to the high levels of local rents.
- 8.9 The Refugee Council are contracted to provide daily support for resettled refugees and were commissioned by the Council via a Hertfordshire wide Framework Agreement. However, this only covers the current resettlement scheme; should Cabinet agree the proposals in this report, an extension to this arrangement would be sought.
- 8.10 A further report will be submitted to Cabinet for consideration once information has been released about the operation and funding of the new resettlement scheme beyond its first year.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The Council has a general power of competence under Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 to do anything that individuals generally may do. It has power to do so "otherwise than for, the benefit of the authority, its area or persons resident or present in its area", which this scheme would be.
- 9.2 Within its terms of reference, Cabinet has remit under 5.6.14 to carry out the Council's responsibilities for the general power of competence; under 5.6.19 it may oversee the authority's policy on the voluntary and community sector and under 5.6.28 it may make decision where a policy or strategy does not exist (and it is not otherwise reserved to Council).
- 9.3 The Refugee Council have been appointed by the Council via a Hertfordshire wide Framework Agreement, initiated by Watford BC. In order to ensure the availability of a support service for new arrivals officers will seek to extend this arrangement, or engage a new service provider, in accordance with the Council's Contract Procurement Rules (January 2019).
- 9.4 The Council's adopted Common Housing Allocation Scheme allows for direct offers of affordable housing to be made in exceptional or urgent circumstances.

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1. It is expected the costs of participating in the first year of the new global resettlement scheme will be fully met by the Home Office.

## **11. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1. The Refugee Council have responded positively to initial discussions regarding the extension of their support service for arrivals under the new scheme. However, they are awaiting confirmation of expected arrivals across Hertfordshire in order to understand the scale and viability of the county wide proposal before confirming their position. The Refugee Council may therefore be unable to participate in the new scheme. Although every effort will be made to find an alternative support provider, due to the specialist nature of the role, there are a limited number of alternative options. As the availability of a specialist support service is vital to the resettlement of refugees, its potential absence leads to the (albeit fairly low) risk that the Council is unable to participate in the new resettlement scheme.

## **12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2. There are no direct equality implications arising from this report. Consideration of both the needs of any individual refugees/families and the wider community will be required to ensure effective integration

## **13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS**

- 13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report.

## **14. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 14.1. From the Council perspective, the resettlement process itself includes sourcing and equipping properties for the refugees, ensuring contractual arrangements are in place (and monitored) for the day-to-day support service and also claiming the stage payments from the Government for each resettled individual. As this report proposes the resettlement of ten Syrian individuals, at a similar rate to recent years, it is anticipated these tasks can be undertaken within existing staff resources.

## **15. APPENDICES**

- 15.1. None.

## **16. CONTACT OFFICERS**

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## **17. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

17.1 The Council's Common Housing Allocation Scheme can be viewed at the following webpage:  
<https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/housing/find-home/apply-social-housing>