

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S REPORT TO CABINET

Date: Urgent Item for 16th September 2015

1. **HEADING** Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme
- Submitted by:** Head of Housing and Regeneration
- Portfolio:** Planning and Housing
- Ward(s) affected:** All

Purpose of the Report

To outline the proposals set out by the Government for a specific Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation scheme.

Recommendations

- a) **To authorise officers to commence discussions with partner organisations to consider establishing local support options.**
- b) **To report to a future Cabinet on the preferred option to support the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme.**

Reasons

There was a commitment given at the September Council meeting to consider support for Syrian refugees. The government has over the last week announced that specific support will be given to a formal Syrian refugee scheme and has asked local authorities if they wish to volunteer to relocate Syrians.

1. **Background**

- 1.1 There are large numbers of people fleeing Syria and nationally the government is working to establish support with the Prime Minister announcing earlier this month that Britain should resettle up to 20,000 Syrian refugees. The UN estimates that at least 7.6million people in Syria have been forced to flee their homes and there are some 3.8million refugees in neighbouring countries.
- 1.2 The Government is asking local authorities to volunteer to take Syrian refugees as part of an organised scheme which prioritises the most vulnerable.
- 1.3 Traditionally Newcastle Borough Council and its local partner organisations have not been involved in any large scale international resettlement or seen large numbers of asylum seekers coming to the area. It is however acknowledged that the local authorities on the south coast, and some of the larger metropolitan authority areas, continue to be under extreme pressure to accommodate increasing numbers of families seeking support. Following the question at this month's Council meeting, specifically in relation to the Syrian Refugees crisis, it is appropriate to consider some of the emerging issues in principle.

2. **Resettlement of refugees**

- 2.1 The Government has operated an existing refugee resettlement programme called Gateway; this operates in collaboration with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and a number of local authorities. The Government is intending to increase the numbers of households resettled from Syria and as such is operating a parallel scheme called the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) Scheme. The government is therefore looking for additional local authorities to participate in the VPR scheme.
- 2.2 The VPR scheme will identify refugees to be taken from the camps in the countries neighbouring Syria using the established UNHCR process for identifying and resettling refugees. The VPR scheme prioritises help for survivors of torture and violence, women and children at risk, and those in need of medical care. Generally, families will comprise 4 to 6 people (inclusive of the head of family) but cases will also consist of single people and the occasional larger family.
- 2.3 Those who are accepted under the VPR Scheme are granted humanitarian protection giving them leave to remain for 5 years with full access to employment and public funds and rights to family reunion comparable to refugees. They are required to enrol their biometrics in order that a Biometric Residence Permit can be issued to them. At the end of the 5 years, if they have not been able to return to Syria, they may be eligible to apply for settlement in the UK.

3. **Proposal and Reasons for Preferred Solution**

- 3.1 Officers are linked into the regional partnership and we are expecting further information to be shared from the West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership on the roll out of the support schemes over the next week.
- 3.2 Local authorities who choose to participate in the scheme take the lead in working with other key local partners to ensure that arrivals are provided with suitable accommodation and the specific needs of these vulnerable individuals are met. It is important to note the significance of the County Council's role in two-tier Local Authority areas such as Newcastle (and it is confirmed that they are engaged in the current discussions). Any Local Authority participation includes securing the prior sign-up of local partners; for health the Clinical Commissioning Group and local NHS England Area Team and through them primary and secondary healthcare providers; and education and housing providers. The Councils would also need to commission the third party providers to deliver orientation services or consider providing this in-house. Consideration will also need to be given to bringing in specialist support providers subject to individuals' specific requirements.
- 3.3 As a non-stock holding authority, but with enabling responsibilities for the Strategic Housing function, this Council would need to have discussions with local registered providers and private landlords to secure access to suitable housing.
- 3.4 The list below provides an indication of the kind of funding that the government envisage being provided, based on agreements made with local authorities who are already participating in the scheme and those who accept new arrivals under the Refugee Gateway programme:
 - Reception and ground travel costs to the receiving area
 - The actual costs of up to two months void costs when securing accommodation plus the actual cost of adapting and furnishing properties where necessary
 - One-off cash and clothing allowance for new arrivals of £200 per person paid in advance of receipt of mainstream benefits

- £600 per head for primary care costs plus first year secondary health care costs including any specialist services that are necessary.
- £4,500 per head for education costs for 5-18 year olds (£2,250 for ages 3-5) plus any first year costs for specialist educational support which may be required
- Where necessary, first year adult and child social care costs as incurred
- Actual costs of providing one year's orientation support including provision of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision.

Local authorities will be given a minimum of 4 weeks notice of new arrivals and longer for any cases with complex care needs.

- 3.5 Subject to members views it is recommended that officers are authorised to discuss the practical nature of volunteering to assist with the VPR scheme. Key to these discussions is ensuring that the County Council, educational institutions, health providers and landlords can support vulnerable Syrians. To ensure that the support services are in place it is likely that the County Council will take the lead in the partnership. A future Cabinet will then be able to assess the options for a suitable package of support in line with the VPR scheme.

4. **Outcomes Linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1 Support for the VPR scheme could contribute to the corporate priority of providing a healthy and active community.

5. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

- 5.1 The option to join the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme is currently voluntary and is totally separate to supporting asylum seekers. By considering supporting Syrian refugees the Council would not be involved in any discussions about becoming a dispersal area for asylum seekers.

6. **Equality Impact Assessment**

- 6.1 The Council will need to ensure that there is support available for any relocated household.

7. **Financial and Resource Implications**

- 7.1 Officer resources will need to be prioritised to take forward the discussions with partner organisations; at this stage it is difficult to quantify the workload demands. Further information is required on how the financial aspects of the VPR scheme will work locally. The government has announced that the cost of supporting the refugees in their first year in Britain will be funded from foreign aid spending.

8. **Major Risks**

- 8.1 A risk assessment will need to be undertaken should the Council choose to join the voluntary scheme.

9. **Key Decision Information**

- 9.1 This is not a key decision.

10. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

- 10.1 None.

11. **List of Appendices**

11.1 None.

12. **Background Papers**

12.1 None.