

**NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S REPORT TO CABINET**

**Date: 11<sup>th</sup> November 2015**

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

**Purpose of the Report**

To consider proposals to work in partnership with the County Council to deliver the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation scheme.

**Recommendations**

- a) To accept the proposals to work with Staffordshire County and other District Councils to establish referrals processes and to authorise officers to commission appropriate support packages in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing.
- b) That the Borough Council confirms its support for the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme being co-ordinated through Staffordshire County Council with the borough accepting 6 households in the first tranche.
- c) Subject to the delivery of the first tranche of relocation of persons qualifying under this scheme to authorise the Executive Director for Regeneration and Development in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing to take forward further tranches in accordance with the processes described in this report.
- d) That if the most appropriate option is to house the Syrian Refugees through a nomination with a Registered Provider (e.g. Aspire Housing), that officers be authorised to make delegated decision(s) for a direct letting and for the nomination to be acknowledged as an exception to the Housing Allocation Policy.
- e) That officers report back on progress with the scheme to a future Cabinet (by no later than June 2016).

**Reasons**

There was a commitment given at the September Council meeting to consider support for Syrian refugees and Cabinet approved to receive a further report outlining the local delivery options. Discussions have commenced with the County Council and it is appropriate that this Council considers the number of households to be supported alongside the resource requirements.

1. **Background**

- 1.1 There continues to be large numbers of people fleeing Syria and many of the particularly vulnerable Syrians living in refugee camps in neighbouring countries. The government has asked local authorities to volunteer to accommodate some of these refugees as part of the national commitment to resettle up to 20,000 Syrian refugees. The Home Office expects it to

take several months to reach full capacity but when the systems are fully operational nationally there will be several hundreds of refugees being resettled each month over the course of Parliament.

- 1.2 The Government is intending to increase the numbers of households resettled from Syria through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) Scheme. The VPR scheme will identify refugees to be taken from the camps in the countries neighbouring Syria using the established United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 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.
- 1.3 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.
- 1.4 As amplified in section 2.2 this matters requires a co-ordinated multi-agency response. The primary area of support that the Borough Council would be expected to provide relates to the Strategic Housing function. As a non-stockholding Authority the responsibility for addressing homelessness (including the provision of housing advice) is discharged through the commissioned Newcastle Housing Advice service. The allocation of properties via the latter service is informed by an Allocations Policy prepared by the Council (in consultation with Registered Providers). The current waiting list is running at about 1810 households. The approved Allocations Policy makes no specific provision for Refugees Any nomination made to a Registered Provider would need to be defined as a 'Direct Let' and be made with a delegated power as it would be an exception to the housing allocation policy.

## 2. Resettlement of refugees

- 2.1 The County Council is establishing a Migration Steering Group to co-ordinate a countywide multi-agency response. This will include representatives from district and borough councils, health and social care and umbrella voluntary sector groups. Alongside this will be a Staffordshire Migration Forum which will provide a wider partnership forum including the County Council, Stoke-on-Trent Council (SOTCC), district and borough councils, other local public sector organisations and agencies, the voluntary and faith sectors and the private sector housing representatives. This forum would come together regularly to share, discuss and agree to take action on any issues which may affect the integration and well-being of Syrian Vulnerable Persons. These groups could be mirrored at an operational level within the Borough to support the refugee response locally. It is proposed that officers discuss having a local operational group to pick up the specific issues arising from the individual households.
- 2.2 The County Council is proposing an integrated approach to ensure that vulnerable refugees are provided with dignified and appropriate support from a range of agencies. Clearly providing a simplified customer experience must be sought to ensure that services are delivered efficiently to these homeless households. The County Council has identified 7 key components:
  - a) **Residency issues** - Whilst refugee status should be in place for Syrian refugees prior to arrival in the UK, support may be required for related issues such as obtaining necessary identity and immigration documentation for themselves or dependents.

*Lead agency – UK Visas and Immigration*

- b) **Health and wellbeing** – an immediate priority is likely to be address any physical and mental health issues.

*Lead agencies:* Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire NHS Partnership Trust (SSOTP), North Staffs Combined NHS Trust, South Staffordshire and Shropshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (SSSFT) and the local Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs).

- c) **Access to settled housing** – finding somewhere stable and secure to live is a vital support requirement.

*Lead agencies:* The Borough Council (with the County Council co-ordinating arrangements for children without parental care and other refugees requiring residential social care) supported by housing landlords.

- d) **Financial stability** – refugees will require help setting up bank accounts and accessing interim financial support (i.e. welfare benefits).

*Lead agencies:* Job Centre Plus, Borough Council benefits team and possibly the local Citizens Advice Bureau.

- e) **Access to childcare and education** – Nursery, school and higher education places will be required for dependent children.

*Lead agency:* County Council (with input from local educational providers).

- f) **Access to training / education and employment** – refugees will be seeking to establish a new life and will be keen to obtain a source of income, should they be capable of working. Making steps towards securing employment and financial independence will be essential to helping them settle in the UK and reducing pressure on public sector budgets.

*Lead agency:* Job centre plus, along with County Council skills and employment team in conjunction with local training organisations.

- g) **Citizenship, culture, faith and community** – support must be given for refugees to assimilate into British culture, to learn English, to integrate with their local faith groups, and to become a cohesive part of their local community.

*Lead agency:* County Council with support from the voluntary sector and faith communities.

- 2.3 Further to paragraph 1.4 the Council would need to balance the local policy context with the Government's call for a national response to the ongoing Syrian Refugee crisis. It is likely that any local response will need to address:

- a. the geographical location in relation to the wide range of support services;
- b. the potential desirability of clustering to provide a degree of mutual support between the Syrian Refugee households;
- c. the availability of accommodation to meet considerations (a) and (b) in a variety of tenures including Social Rented, Private Rented and B & B accommodation.

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

- 3.1 Taking a co-ordinated approach throughout Staffordshire will assist in sharing best practice and provide capacity for taking the practical steps of relocating the individual refugees. The County Council will be able to provide the key link to the West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership (WMSMP).

- 3.2 Through the recommended Staffordshire-wide approach the Councils and key partner agencies will be able to work alongside existing voluntary sector support providers and to consider commissioning third party providers to deliver orientation services or provide 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. As the scheme is accommodating vulnerable persons the Council will be looking to make direct payments to landlords. Subject to discussions with the partner organisations it would be appropriate for the Council to consider working with voluntary sector specialist housing support providers to provide advice and support in finding and settling in a new home. Ideally the Council would like to secure accommodation for the arrival of the refugees and to minimise the use of emergency homeless accommodation. Should the Council work with a specialist provider they can start discussions with private landlords to secure private rented accommodation and be ready to establish services like gas and electric when the household arrives.
- 3.4 The Council commissions the Furniture Mine to provide recycled furniture to homeless households. This service can be used to secure furniture cost-effectively and where necessary additional furniture may need to be purchased to meet the needs of the individual family. The County Council is also looking to find ways of providing items such as bedding and kitchen white goods.
- 3.5 Originally the County Council made an offer to accept 50 refugees in the first tranche and they have asked District Councils to confirm the number they are willing to accommodate. It is proposed that the Council offers to assist 6 households in the first tranche; this is in line with provisional views of other districts in the County.

#### 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 and its partner agencies / organisations will need to ensure that there is a range of appropriate 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 within Staffordshire. The government has announced that the cost of supporting the refugees in their first year in Britain will be funded from foreign aid spending. The Local Government Association (LGA) has requested that the Government extends this support to

cover the full 5 year period of support required. It is understood that the funding will be based on a fixed rate per refugee and will be used to contribute towards health and social care costs with some support for housing.

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 and;
- Actual costs of providing one year's orientation support including provision of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

7.2 The council uses a company for interpretation and translation services; it's difficult to predict the costs of translation calls (both in terms of the number of calls that any household may require and the length of the calls), however it should be acknowledged that these costs will be above the normal budgeted levels. Whilst the year one costs are covered, there may be some minor increased costs in future years should the persons within these households need further assistance.

7.3 In terms of securing accommodation it is anticipated that there will be a need to cover the rent of the properties for a few weeks between the property becoming vacant and the family moving in. Officers recommend that void payments are made as this would be cheaper and, importantly, better for the family than using emergency housing whilst a property is secured. It is proposed that officers agree a process for securing appropriate housing as part of the Staffordshire-wide approach.

## 8. **Major Risks**

8.1 The key issues and areas of risk have been identified in the earlier parts of this report. More operationally-based risk assessments will need to be updated as the local working procedures are established and these will be shared with the relevant Portfolio Holders as appropriate.

## 9. **Key Decision Information**

9.1 This is not a key decision.

## 10. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

10.1 Cabinet approved in September 2015:  
(i) That officers be authorised to commence discussions with partner organisations to consider establishing local support options.  
(ii) That it be reported to a future Cabinet on the preferred option to support the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme

## 11. **List of Appendices**

11.1 None.

12. **Background Papers**

12.1 Various exchanges of correspondence with government and other partner agencies in this matter.