

Agenda Item 10

Cabinet Member	Councillor Vivienne Michael
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Date	27 November 2018
Ward (s) affected	N/a
Key Decision	No

Subject	Syrian Refugee Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme - Update
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Recommendations

The Cabinet is recommended to:

- note that the Council's progress in meeting its commitment to the Syrian Refugee Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme and the constraints in meeting the full commitment;
- approve that Community Sponsorship is recognised as an appropriate means to encourage and enable the resettlement Syrian Refugees under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme; and
- approve that delegated authority is granted to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council to give consent to Community Sponsors subject to them meeting the Home Office criteria (section 5 below) for that consent.

Executive Summary

- On 20 October 2015, and taking into account the housing pressures in the area, the former Executive approved to resettle a maximum of five refugee households per year over the five years of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). The accommodation was to be secured from the private rented sector and in Clarion Housing's sheltered housing stock for single people and couples over 55.
- From June 2016, eleven households have been greeted and commenced the resettlement process in Mole Valley, comprising of a mix of 36 adults and children. The Council to date has accepted the highest number of households in Surrey compared to other authorities apart from Woking.
- The households are progressing well with improving English, children attending school, health needs being met and for some moving into voluntary and paid work.

- It was anticipated that of Mole Valley's commitment of 25 households over five years, 15 households would be single or couples mainly over 55 years old. Unfortunately, the Home Office has only been able to refer a few households in this category meaning that the 25 total cannot easily be achieved, because to achieve the total by providing more family accommodation would place pressure on private rented sector accommodation needed for the Council to fulfil its duties to accommodate statutory homeless households.
- In view of the above and because the Housing Team needs to concentrate on the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, there remains the opportunity to resettle households through the Community Sponsorship Scheme.
- The Home Office is encouraging Community Sponsorship in response to the desire from civil society to play a greater role in refugee resettlement. It is a model that has been used in Canada since 1976 and has been piloted in Australia, Switzerland, Germany and Ireland and more recently in Italy, New Zealand and the UK.
- Community Sponsorship enables local community groups to take responsibility to welcome and support refugees directly into their communities and complements resettlement work undertaken by local authorities.
- A multi-faith group in Mole Valley is keen to become a Community Sponsor and has prepared an application to the Home Office that will first need to be considered for consent by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council. This is a positive and constructive way for the Council to continue to support the resettlement of Syrian Refugees through the VPRS.

Corporate Priority Outcomes

Prosperity

- **A vibrant local economy with thriving towns and villages**
 - The resettlement of refugee households in Mole Valley adds to the diversity of the area and the households will have the opportunity in the long term to contribute to the local economy through employment and voluntary work.

Community Wellbeing

Active communities and support for those who need it

- **Improve opportunities for residents to live active lives.**
- **Promote community spirit, encourage individuals, families and communities to be support each other and help our neighbourhoods to be more resilient in times of need.**

- Refugee households need help and support to integrate within the local community and to improve their overall wellbeing. The Syrian VPRS and Community Sponsorship Scheme present opportunities across the local community to welcome and support refugee households and work closely together to promote community spirit.

The Cabinet has the authority to determine the recommendations.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Home Secretary launched the Syrian VPRS in January 2014, and invited all local authorities in the UK to participate. A limited number of authorities joined and the first refugees arrived in the UK in March 2014.
- 1.2 In response to the conflict in Syria the Prime Minister announced on 7 September 2015, a significant extension of the VPRS to resettle up to 20,000 individual refugees over five years and requested local authorities to assist.
- 1.3 On 20 October 2015, and taking into account the housing pressures in the area, the former Executive approved to resettle a maximum of five refugee households per year over the five years of the VPRS. The accommodation was to be secured from the private rented sector and in Clarion's sheltered housing stock for single people and couples over 55.
- 1.4 All Surrey districts and boroughs have participated in the scheme, apart from Spelthorne because of housing pressures. The County, boroughs, districts, health, faith and voluntary sectors formed a partnership to ensure that support has been planned and coordinated for refugee households that have been resettled in the area. This has resulted in over two hundred individuals being resettled in Surrey. Nationally around 12,700 individuals have been resettled to date.
- 1.5 The Government has provided advice on the gov.uk website to inform the general public on how they can help and support Syrian refugees. It signposts the public to a Red Cross dedicated phone line as well as to other international agencies providing relief efforts.

2.0 Outcome of the Syrian Refugee Vulnerable Persons' Resettlement Programme in Mole Valley

- 2.1 General figures are given below on the results of the programme. To provide greater detail on the resettled households presents the risk of identifying individuals.
- 2.2 From June 2016 eleven households have been greeted and commenced the resettlement process in Mole Valley, comprising of a mix of 36 adults and children. Mole Valley to date has accepted the highest number of households in Surrey compared to other authorities, apart from Woking.
- 2.3 Over the period of resettlement the number of households and individuals in Mole Valley has increased through births and decreased by changes in family circumstances. The total number currently supported is 26.

- 2.4 The Housing Team found and set up properties ready for households to arrive, while the Refugee Support Workers provided by the East Surrey Family Support Programme provide the essential practical and welfare support that is complemented by a volunteer programme. The Home Office provides funding towards these activities on a reducing scale over the five years. In the first year Home Office funding is also provided for schools and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) with the option of additional funding for extra costs. There is also additional funding available for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and childcare to enable attendance at ESOL classes.
- 2.5 Locally households have progressed well with improving English, children attending school, health needs being met and for some moving into voluntary and paid work.
- 2.6 It was anticipated that of Mole Valley's commitment of 25 households over five years, 15 households would be single or couples mainly over 55 years old. Unfortunately, the Home Office has only been able to refer a few households in this category meaning that the 25 total cannot easily be achieved, because to achieve the total by providing more family accommodation would place pressure on private rented sector accommodation needed for the Council to fulfil its duties to accommodate statutory homeless households.
- 2.7 In view of the above and because the Housing Team needs to concentrate on the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, there remains the opportunity to resettle households through the Community Sponsorship Scheme. The scheme is explained below.

3.0 Community Sponsorship Scheme

- 3.1 The Home Office is encouraging Community Sponsorship in response to the desire from civil society to play a greater role in refugee resettlement. It is a model that has been used in Canada since 1976 and has been piloted in Australia, Switzerland, Germany and Ireland and more recently in Italy, New Zealand and the UK.
- 3.2 Community Sponsorship enables local community groups to take responsibility to welcome and support refugees directly into their communities and complement resettlement work already undertaken by local authorities.
- 3.3 To become a community sponsor groups must:
- be a registered charity or Community Interest Company;
 - have secured suitable affordable accommodation for two years;
 - have at least £9,000;
 - have consent from the local authority that their application is approved in principle; and
 - apply to the Home Office for their application to be approved.

- 3.4 Under the scheme a community sponsor is responsible for:
- finding a property that will be available for two years;
 - providing resettlement support for one year;
 - meeting a household at the airport;
 - providing a warm welcome and cultural orientation;
 - supporting access to medical, social and welfare services;
 - English language tuition; and
 - support towards volunteering, employment, self sufficiency and independence.
- 3.5 At the end of the first year responsibility for resettlement transfers to the local authority. Community Sponsors do not receive Home Office funding, though it remains available in the first year for the CCGs and schools. The Home Office will review progress of the household at the end of the first year and will provide the local authority with funding for the support if needed for years two to five. In many cases the Community Sponsor will remain on a voluntary basis in a supporting role with the household.
- 3.6 A multi-faith group in Mole Valley is keen to become a Community Sponsor and has prepared an application to the Home Office and have requested local authority consent. It is recommended that the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council gives consent to Community Sponsors subject to them meeting the Home Office criteria described in section 5 below.
- 3.7 The Community Sponsorship scheme is a positive and constructive way for the Council to continue to support the resettlement of Syrian Refugees through the VPRS.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The Council's costs are recovered from the Home Office per refugee through the VPRS on a reducing scale over the five years of the programme. The total that the Council can claim over five years per person is £20,250. Costs have included securing accommodation, furnishing accommodation, the meet and greet arrangements, topping up rents when required, and payments for the East Surrey Family Support Programme Refugee Support Workers. These costs have been recovered through the grant and any balance remaining at the end of the financial year is carried over to the next year in the long term interests of supporting the resettled refugees.
- 4.2 In the first year of resettlement the Council claims grant on behalf of the schools and the CCGs make their claims direct to the Home Office.
- 4.3 For the Community Sponsorship Scheme the Council should be able to claim grant from years two to five subject to the outcome of the year one review by the Home Office. Should grant not be provided it will be because the Home Office has determined that the household is independent and no longer requires structured support.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 Local authorities are not responsible for assessing applications and managing the community sponsorship process, as this lies with the Home Office.
- 5.2 Local authorities are not asked to assess community sponsorship applications, assess a community group's ability to deliver effective refugee resettlement or consider if a group has suitably trained or vetted volunteers.
- 5.3 Local authorities are asked to support community groups by:
putting groups in contact with the local safeguarding boards to advise on the group's safeguarding policy; arranging an inspection of the proposed accommodation by the Environmental Health Team; supporting engagement of relevant partners, such as the police, education providers, Job Centres and CCGs; providing local authority consent that the group can operate as a community sponsor in the area; and after the group's approval by the Home Office agree to accept the refugee household referred by the Home Office for the group to support. The current applicant has been appropriately signposted and approached the various organisations.
- 5.4 The prospective sponsor must obtain written evidence from the local authority that they consent to the approval of the application. Typically, this consent is provided by the Chief Executive Officer with the authority to consent on behalf of the local authority.
- 5.5 Grounds on which a local authority might object are: insufficient capacity to provide certain crucial local services in the proposed housing area (e.g. lack of school places); concerns about community tensions in the proposed housing area; and where they have reason to believe that the community sponsor is not suitable to undertake the resettlement of vulnerable adults and children; or another appropriate reason.

6.0 Options

- 6.1 There are three options the Cabinet is asked to consider.

6.2 Option 1

The recommendations contained in this report are to approve that:

- Community Sponsorship is encouraged and enabled as a means to resettle Syrian Refugees under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme; and
- the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, gives consent to Community Sponsors subject to them meeting the Home Officer criteria (section 5 below) for that consent.

6.3 Option 2

Do not approve the recommendations contained in this report and request further work to be undertaken.

6.4 Option 3

Do not approve the recommendations contained in this report.

7.0 Corporate Implications

7.1 Monitoring Officer Commentary

The Monitoring Officer is satisfied that all relevant legal implications have been taken into account.

7.2 S151 Officer Commentary

Financial assistance is provided in the form of grant assistance by the Home Office. Effectively the VPRS is cost neutral to the Council, although a staff resource is provided to administer and monitor the scheme.

8.0 Risk Implications

8.1 Option 1

The recommendations contained in this report are to approve that:

- Community Sponsorship is encouraged and enabled as a means to resettle Syrian Refugees under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme and;
- the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council gives consent to Community Sponsors subject to them meeting the Home Officer criteria (section 5 below) for that consent.

The recommendations carry a degree of risk in terms of reputation if the Council gives consent to an application from a Community Sponsor that is then refused by the Home Office. To mitigate this risk it will be ensured that the Council's role described in section 5 above has been fully undertaken. It is also possible that the Home Office will refuse an application on grounds that the Council is not party to.

8.2 Option 2

Do not approve the recommendations contained in this report and request further work to be undertaken. The key risk will be to delay the progress of the Community Sponsorship application that the group has developed to the local authority consent stage.

8.3 Option 3

Do not approve the recommendations contained in this report. This will prevent the Community Sponsorship application and future applications progressing and future Syrian VPRS households from being resettled in Mole Valley. Overall it would be a discouraging message to give to willing Community Sponsors.

9.0 Equalities Implications

9.1 The Equalities Impact Assessment produced in October 2015 has been updated and is attached to this report at Appendix 1.

10.0 Employment Issues

10.1 There are no employment issues relating to this report.

11.0 Sustainability Issues

11.1 There are no sustainability issues relating to this report.

12.0 Consultation

12.1 There has been no external consultation on this report.

13.0 Communications

- 13.1 MVDC's website includes a section to signpost residents on how they can support Syrian refugees.
- 13.2 The Syrian VPRS is a low key programme to protect individuals and a press release is therefore not planned.

14.0 Background Papers

- 14.1 Surrey Syrian VPRS Board – resettlement statistics September 2018
- 14.2 Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) Guidance for local authorities and partners - Home Office July 2017
- 14.3 Community Sponsorship Guidance for Prospective Sponsors - Home Office July 2017
- 14.4 Community Sponsorship Guidance for Local Authorities - Home Office 2017

Equality Impact Assessment

Syrian Refugee – Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme 2015

Updated 2018

Department	
Name of assessor	Alison Wilks
Strategic Management Lead	Rachel O'Reilly
Date of assessment	13 October 2015 & 24 September 2018
Is this a new or existing function or policy?	New

Please note that guidance (revised in March 2014) for completing this template is available on the intranet. This template was also revised in March 2014.

Section 1: Introduction and background (see p.10 of the guidance)

Please describe your service or function. This should include:

- The aims and scope
- The main beneficiaries or users
- The main equality, accessibility, social exclusion issues and barriers, and the 'protected characteristics'¹ they relate to (not all assessments will encounter issues relating to every protected characteristic)

If this EIA is part of a project it is important to focus on the service or policy the project aims to review or improve.

The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) aims to provide a structured and phased programme of resettlement for the most vulnerable refugees living in camps.

Selection is based on the following criteria: 'women and girls at risk; survivors of violence and/or torture; refugees with legal and/or physical protection needs; refugees with medical needs or disabilities; children and adolescents at risk; persons at risk due to their sexual orientation or gender identity; and refugees with family links in resettlement countries'.

The Council has participated in the scheme to from October 2015.

The Council meets the Home Office requirements of the VPRS and this involves securing and furnishing accommodation, meeting and greeting the refugee households, arranging translation services, commissioning the East Surrey Family Support Programme to provide support, health, welfare and integration services and English for Speakers of other Languages courses.

From 2018 resettlement in the first year will also be provided by Council and Home Office approved local Community Sponsors.

Now describe how this fits into the Council's Corporate Priorities, Sustainable Community Strategy or other local, regional or national plans and priorities.

¹ More information and definition of protected characteristics can be found [here](#)

PROSPERITY

- **A vibrant local economy with thriving towns and villages**
 - The resettlement of refugee households in Mole Valley will add to the diversity of the area and the households will have the opportunity in the long term to contribute to the local economy through employment and voluntary work.

COMMUNITY WELLBEING

Active communities and support for those who need it

- **Improve opportunities for residents to live active lives.**
- **Promote community spirit, encourage individuals, families and communities to be support each other and help our neighbourhoods to be more resilient in times of need.**
 - Refugee households will need help and support to integrate within the local community and to improve their overall wellbeing. The VPRS and Community Sponsorship Scheme present opportunities across the local community to welcome and support refugee households and work closely together to promote community spirit.

If you are not carrying out an equality impact assessment, briefly summarise reasons why you have reached this conclusion, the evidence for this and the nature of any stakeholder verification of your conclusion.

n/a

Section 2: Analysis and assessment (see pp. 10-13 of the guidance)

Given available information, what is the actual or likely impact on minority, disadvantaged, vulnerable and socially excluded groups?

Indicate for each 'protected characteristics' whether there may be a positive impact, negative impact, a mixture of both or no impact.

Protected characteristics	Positive	Negative	No impact	Reason
Age	✓			Refugees of all ages have been accepted to be resettled in Mole Valley and this will continue under Community Sponsorship.
Disability	✓			Positive -The VPRS aims to

				protect refugees with medical needs or disabilities
Gender reassignment	✓			The VPRS aims to protect refugees at risk due to their sexual orientation or gender identity
Marriage and civil partnership			✓	
Pregnancy and maternity			✓	
Race	✓			The VPRS is specifically for refugees from Syria of all faiths and beliefs. The Neighbourhood Police are notified of households that are resettled and should any negative incidents occur they will be notified along with the Surrey Prevent Team.
Religion or belief	✓			The VPRS is specifically for refugees from Syria. The Neighbourhood Police are notified of households that are resettled and should any negative incidents occur they will be notified along with the Surrey Prevent Team.
Sex	✓			The VPRS aims to protect refugee women who are at risk and survivors of violence.
Sexual orientation	✓			The VPRS scheme aims to protect refugees at risk due to their sexual orientation or gender identity
Other aspects to consider	Positive	Negative	No impact	Reason
Carers			✓	
Rural/urban issues			✓	
HR issues (how will staff with protected characteristics be affected?)			✓	

What can be done to reduce the effects of any negative impacts? Where negative impact cannot be completely diminished, can this be justified, and is it lawful?

There are currently no negative impacts.

Where there are positive impacts, what changes have been or will be made? Who are the beneficiaries? How have they benefited?

The Council commissions' specialist services to meet the specific identified needs of refugees through the East Surrey Family Support Team and Community Sponsors will also play a role in the future.

Section 3: Evidence gathering and fact-finding (see p.14 of the guidance)

What evidence is available to support your views above? Please include:

- A summary of the available evidence
- Identification of where there are gaps in the evidence (this may identify a need for more evidence in the action plan)
- What information is currently captured with respect to usage and take up of services.
- What the current situation is in relation to equality and diversity monitoring (where relevant)

The Council has participated in the VPRS since October 2015 and the questions above have been answered based on the experience of the last three years.

How have stakeholders been involved in this assessment? Who are they, and what is their view?

Stakeholders have not been involved with this assessment. However, the VPRS work is monitored by the multi-agency Surrey Syrian Refugee Board and through close working with the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration and the Home Office.

Recommendations

Please summarise the main recommendations arising from the assessment. NB If it is impossible to diminish negative impacts to an acceptable or even lawful level the recommendation should be that the proposal or the relevant part of it should not proceed.

There are no current recommendations.

Section 4: Action Plan (see pp.15-16 of the guidance)

Actions needed to implement the EIA recommendations

Issue	Action	Expected outcome	Who	Deadline for action
None				

Sign off

Who will be responsible for reviewing this EIA?	Alison Wilks
Review date(s) i.e. when will this EIA be reviewed – see p.9 of guidance	September 2019
Strategic Management Lead signed off	Rachel O'Reilly

- Signed off electronic version to be kept in your team for review
- Electronic copy to be forwarded to the Policy and Performance Team for publishing