

Agenda Item

Cabinet Member	Councillor Vivienne Michael		
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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 increase 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 increase 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