

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET – 6 NOVEMBER
REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR (HOUSING AND COMMUNITY)

SYRIAN VULNERABLE PERSONS RELOCATION SCHEME

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 In September 2015 the Prime Minister announced that the government was increasing its commitment to the resettlement of Syrian refugees
- 1.2 In April 2016 Cabinet agreed that the council should participate in the Syrian Vulnerable Person's Relocation Scheme, with an initial target to resettle up to 10 Syrian refugees in our borough
- 1.3 Since then the council has resettled two families (11 people in total) and has recently accepted a third family which has links to other families already resettled in neighbouring boroughs.
- 1.4 We expect the third family (five people) to arrive in December, which will then bring the total number of people the council has helped to 16.
- 1.5 This report provides an update, as well asking Cabinet to endorse that the council continues to offer assistance, with resettlement of further families prior to the conclusion of this scheme in March 2020.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 Cabinet notes that the council has resettled two families (11 people) through the Syrian Vulnerable Person's Relocation Scheme and that a third family (five people) have been accepted, due to arrive in December 2018
- 2.2 Cabinet endorses the proposal to resettle further families via the scheme by the end of March 2020.

3 Explanation

- 3.1 On the 7 September 2015, the Prime Minister announced an expansion of the existing Syrian Vulnerable persons Relocation Scheme which was set up in 2014.
- 3.2 Its primary purpose is to resettle 20,000 vulnerable Syrian persons from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in a way that:
 - 3.2.1 Secures nationality security and public protection, and
 - 3.2.2 Has the wellbeing of the vulnerable persons and the welcoming communities at the centre of decision making, and
 - 3.2.3 Delivers value for money for the UK tax payer.

- 3.3 The Programme is run in partnership with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (the 'UNHCR'). It demonstrates the UK's support for the UNHCR's global effort to relieve the humanitarian crisis through the provision of resettlement opportunities for some of the most vulnerable Syrian people into communities within the UK, over the life of the Parliament, who:
- 3.3.1 have registered with the UNHCR in Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and other countries across the MENA region as a result of the current crisis; and
- 3.3.2 the UNHCR consider meet one of their vulnerability criteria which are set out below
- Legal and/or Physical Protection Needs of the refugee in the country of refuge (this includes a threat of refoulement¹);
 - Survivors of Torture and/or Violence, where repatriation or the conditions of asylum could result in further traumatization and/or heightened risk; or where appropriate treatment is not available;
 - Medical Needs, in particular life-saving treatment that is unavailable in the country of refuge;
 - Women and Girls at Risk, who have protection problems particular to their gender;
 - Family Reunification, when resettlement is the only means to reunite refugee family members who, owing to refugee flight or displacement, are separated by borders or entire continents;
 - Children and Adolescents at Risk, where a best interests determination supports resettlement;
 - Lack of Foreseeable Alternative Durable Solutions
- 3.4 A Hertfordshire wide coordinating group was established and via this group, recognising the specialist skills required to manage resettlement of refugees, the Refugee Council was commissioned to help. Watford Council later led on a procurement exercise to establish a framework, which all Herts councils could benefit from. The refugee council were successful and therefore continue to be the commissioned service provider
- 3.5 The refugee council provides all the support including meeting and greeting the families at the airport, clothing, welcome pack of groceries, ongoing advice and assistance with orienteering and acclimatising
- 3.6 The council arranges a suitably furnished property, which includes basic household goods - as specified by the Home Office and provides an initial briefing on health and safety matters.
- 3.7 The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) identifies and submits potential cases which fit the criteria set by the UK for consideration.

¹ the forcible return of refugees or asylum seekers to a country where they are liable to be subjected to persecution

Cases are screened and considered on the information available and the UK retains the right to refuse cases on security or other grounds.

- 3.8 Once the screening process has been completed a full medical assessment is conducted by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in the host country. Full details of the case including medical history are prepared so that it can be sent to the receiving council at such time as a referral is made.
- 3.9 Following this, eligibility is then confirmed and the IOM starts the visa applications process.
- 3.10 The statement of requirements for the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocations Scheme (VPR) sets out the requirements for the council.
- 3.11 The council received and resettled the first family in June 2017. Although we had signed up to the scheme much earlier, the Hertfordshire authorities agreed to receive families across a broad timeframe, which meant that the refugee council could appropriately support each family post arrival. We also had some delays because due to unforeseen circumstances the first two families we were due to resettle were relocated elsewhere.
- 3.12 The second family were resettled in February 2018 and the third family are likely to arrive in December this year.
- 3.13 The resettlement programme is coordinated within Hertfordshire by the Strategic Migration Partnership (SMP), part of the Local Government Association.
- 3.14 All of the Hertfordshire authorities agreed to resettle families (other than Broxbourne) and several families have now been resettled across the county.
- 3.15 A number of families left in the camps are linked to families who are already resettled and the council has been asked to consider helping further families who have links to families who are already settled.

Implications

4 Legal Implication(s)

- 4.1 The VPR is a national and voluntary scheme. The council should ensure that it has the infrastructure and support needed to ensure the appropriate care can be delivered under the scheme and must meet the Statement of Requirements set out by government when it assists people under this scheme
- 4.2 Watford Borough Council led on the procurement of a framework agreement for the provision of support as required under the Statement of Requirements

5 Financial Implication(s)

- 5.1 The government has committed to covering the costs of resettled refugees' first year in the UK from the International Aid budget at a rate of £8,520 per person. There is an additional sum available for each child of school age, which is paid to the relevant school/college by the council and claimed back from government.

- 5.2 The funding for years 2 to five are paid as un-ring-fenced grant of up to £12,000 per person as set out in the table below:

Year	Amount
Year Two	£5,000
Year Three	£3,700
Year Four	£2,300
Year Five	£1,000

6 Risk Management Implications

- 6.1 The risks related to this proposal are:
- 6.2 Reputational: the council is working in close collaboration with other Hertfordshire authorities to benefit from shared learning and the commissioning of the expert services of the Refugee Council has ensured that families being resettled are getting the right support. There is also the benefit of the potential to establish networks for families and to commission services, such as language classes, in a more cost effective way. The resettlement of the first two families was very successful. Likelihood Low; Impact Medium
- 6.3 Financial: the scheme is fully funded by government grant and this has been sufficient to meet all the costs of resettling the families. Likelihood Low: Impact Low

7 Security and Terrorism Implication(s)

- 7.1 The Home Office and UNHCR are conducting risk assessments prior to a person being accepted as eligible for assistance under this scheme.

8 Procurement Implication(s)

- 8.1 Watford Borough Council led on a procurement exercise to establish a provider for both the support and the furnishing of dwellings, which all Hertfordshire councils can use

9 Climate Change Implication(s)

- 9.1 There are no climate change implications arising from this report

10 Human Resources Implication(s)

- 10.1 Participating in the scheme requires a named lead officer within the council who is responsible for coordinating the support and property in advance of the arrival, as well as ensuring the relevant claims have been made for grant funding. This is being done by an existing member of staff whose current job role is compatible with the demands of this project.

11 Health and Wellbeing Implication(s)

11.1 Participating in this programme and approval to extend the help to more families will improve the health and wellbeing of the families concerned.

12 Communication and Engagement Implication(s)

12.1 The council has communicated proactively and positively about the help it has offered under the programme and will communicate in a proactive way in advance of the arrival of the next family and any future resettlements.

13 Link to Corporate Priorities

13.1 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's Corporate Priority promoting inclusive and safe communities

14 Equality and Diversity

14.1 The EqIA identified that there is the potential for positive impact, as this scheme specifically helps refugees who are in need of resettlement. The programme is designed to meet the needs of each family based on their race and any disability or support need.

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Background papers to be listed (if applicable)

Appendices to be listed