



PAPER H

Purpose: For Decision

Committee report

Committee	EXECUTIVE
Date	12 JANUARY 2017
Title	A LOCAL RESPONSE TO REFUGEE RE SETTLEMENT
Report to	DEPUTY LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND PUBLIC HEALTH

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Members are provided with an update on the progress made in respect of developing a local response to refugee re-settlement and in readiness to make an offer to accommodate up to five families as soon as is feasibly possible. Details are provided of the action taken, arrangements that have been put in place and the planning activity necessary over the coming months.

BACKGROUND

2. A report to Executive on 8 September 2016 set out the considerations that required attention for the Isle of Wight that would ensure a sustainable local response to be given to national and international migration and refugee settlement. This report sets out the context of an unprecedented movement of people in search of security and refuge from violence, oppression and economic failure. Particular reference was made to those suffering from the effects of war in Syria. The Executive noted the new statutory responsibilities placed on local authorities in respect of unaccompanied migrant and refugee children; government intentions for councils to respond to Home Office proposals for accommodating temporary migrant residents and concluded that it was essential to be in a position to make a formal offer for the re-settlement of Syrian refugees as soon as feasibly possible. The Executive agreed that an assessment of the council and community's capacity to participate in the vulnerable persons' resettlement scheme should be undertaken and to develop an action plan in response to facilitate an offer to be made for up to five families.
3. The deputy leader and Executive member for adult social care and public health provided an update in his report to Full Council on the progress being made and provided details of the actions taken thus far. His report concluded that there had been an overwhelming response for help and support, which meant that it was anticipated, subject to suitable housing being identified, the first arrivals could be received in February 2017.

4. The Syrian vulnerable persons re-location scheme (VPR) which has been in place since 2014, is designed to assist people in most need and specifically those who are in need of urgent care, survivors of torture and violence and women and children at risk. All applicants are subject to immigration checks and screening prior to a visa being granted. Those with a criminal past or links to war crimes or extremism are automatically excluded from the scheme. Individual refugees relocated under the scheme are identified by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and are allowed to bring their immediate family with them although this is limited to one spouse/partner (who must be over 18) and their children. There is no provision to allow applicants to bring other dependent relatives unless they meet the vulnerability criteria in their own right or that the Home Office is satisfied that there is an existing dependency.
5. Those that are accepted under the VPR scheme are granted humanitarian protection giving them leave to remain for five years. They are required to enrol their biometrics in order that a Biometric Residence Permit can be issued. At the end of the five years, if they have not been able to return to Syria, they may be eligible to apply for settlement in the United Kingdom. Central government has made funding available to local authorities to cover the costs associated with the initial costs of integration and potential strain on local services. This funding is tapered over a four year period to reflect that families over time, with encouragement and support, can become self-reliant and financially independent.
6. It is recognised that resettlement programmes work best where there is good local community support available to welcome and sustain arrivals through offers of learning and work, gifts of household items and practical help to assist with integration into British life. It has been considered necessary therefore to be confident that the Island is ready to receive people who have been subject to such tragic circumstances, in order to offer them the best possible start to life in England. Actions taken thus far have enabled the following:
 - (a) Numerous offers to be received for donations of furniture and other household items from voluntary organisations and individuals who are willing to offer their help and support. This will be invaluable in ensuring that housing is adequately furnished and comfortable for families in need.
 - (b) The identification of people within the community who are Arabic speaking and who are willing to offer their help to arrival families in settling into a new community and way of life and who can provide conversational support to them. However, there is a need to make additional translation/interpreting services available where specific language expertise is necessary to assist with legal matters or when accessing and using public services and these are in the process of being procured.
 - (c) Local Educational Services Overseas Limited (ESOL) accredited courses identified that will enable families to develop English language skills as an important element of helping families to integrate with the Island's community.

- (d) With assistance from the voluntary sector, the establishment of a proposal to appoint a keyworker to work with families during their first twelve months after arrival and who will facilitate:
- (i) initial resettlement and orientation activities;
 - (ii) the establishment of individual support plans;
 - (iii) access public and other services required;
 - (iv) access to vocational courses and English language speaking programmes;
 - (v) access to the job centre and other organisations that can assist with securing employment opportunities;
 - (vi) access to school and college places that have been identified;
 - (vii) knowledge of and confidence in accessing local community resources;
 - (viii) the establishment of support networks.

It will be necessary to undertake a recruitment campaign to appoint a suitably experienced and/or qualified person that preferably is Arabic speaking (but not essential) in order for families to be confident that arrival families have access to someone who is understanding and empathetic of their needs. Recruitment to this role is due to be initiated shortly.

7. A housing interest survey was launched at the end of October 2016, followed by a landlord fair on 13 December 2016. A number of generous accommodation offers, which subject to checks may be suitable for housing families upon arrival. Thus far six properties are under assessment for suitability. However, It is vitally important that any such housing must to be fit for purpose, is safe and of a standard that meets the basic needs of families as a minimum. . As a result of financial limitations, tenancies can only be offered at the Local Housing Allowance (housing benefit) rates – currently set at:
- (a) A two bedroom property - weekly: £121.97 and monthly: £528.5
 - (b) A three bedroom property - weekly: £149.59 and monthly: £648.22
 - (c) A four bedroom property - weekly: £184.11 and monthly: £797.81

Properties also need to be let on an assured shorthold tenancy for a minimum of twelve months.

8. It cannot be underestimated, the amount of preparatory work that needs to be undertaken and the significant importance of ensuring that the key elements of support are in place before arrival. These are specifically those relating to adequate housing, access to translation services and a keyworker. A substantial amount of effort has been put in to the co-ordination and delivery of these issues, with immense support from members of the community, partner organisations and the voluntary sector. However, such matters take time and staffing resource. Identifying suitable accommodation has been a challenge thus far particularly in light of the limited rental funding that can be offered to prospective landlords.
9. There are strict cut off dates at which local authorities can indicate their readiness to make an offer to families and there is generally an eight week gap between offer

and flight arrival in Britain. There are scheduled flight arrivals for February, April, May, July and August 2017 at the present time. While every effort is being made to be in a position to formalise an offer for February 2017, unless sufficient accommodation can be identified by the cut-off point of 9 January and confidence that a keyworker can be in post, it is likely that April 2017 will be the earliest feasible option.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

10. The council's corporate plan does not directly address the specific needs of migrant and refugee families. However, the primary objective of the VPR scheme is to provide people with a safe and secure place to recover from their trauma and to rebuild their lives and to prosper. Such principles are therefore considered to be linked to the corporate priorities of protecting the most vulnerable with health and social care, investing in support, prevention and continuing care and keeping children safe and improving their education.

CONSULTATION

11. The council continues to be engaged with regional migration partnership forums and other information sharing forum provided by the South East Migration Partnership, Home Office and other related bodies. This is a vital source for developing knowledge and understanding of both the needs of families arriving in the United Kingdom but also the strategies and approaches that have been taken that have been successful in supporting vulnerable people in the early days of arrival.
12. The lead officer within the council who has taken responsibility for the co-ordination of an offer to be made to receive families on the Island has approached local community, faith and interest groups, voluntary organisations, local community leaders, town and parish councils to identify and map local resources that could be made available. As a result, there has been an overwhelming number of genuine and very generous offers of help and support. This combined with the establishment of a strategy group consisting of representatives from public sector partners, voluntary groups and internal specialists has enabled an overall strategy and plan to be established.

FINANCIAL / BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

13. The Executive at its meeting of 8 September 2016 committed the council to making officer and member time and resources available to co-ordinate all the relevant activities necessary to prepare for an offer to be made for the re-settlement of up to five Syrian refugee families.
14. Funding for the re-settlement of Syrian refugee families is made available from central government. For a typical family of five, this would for example, attract first year scheme payments of up to £75,000, comprised of £51,000 that would be provided to the local authority and school funding, £12,700 for benefits payments to the Department for Work and Pensions and up to £11,000 to the local NHS. The government has committed to funding for years two to four of re-settlement but

tapering payments to reflect integration and financial independence. Using the above example, this would mean that funding would reduce to £25,000 in year two, down to £5,000 in year 4. Table 1 below sets out the breakdown of funding for information.

Table 1: First year unit funding

	Benefit claimant	Other adults	Child aged 5 – 18	Child aged 3 – 4	Child aged Under 3
Local authority	£8,520	£8,520	£8,520	£8,520	£8,520
Education	£0	£0	£4,500	£4,500	£0
Special educational needs	£0	£0	£1,000	£1,000	£0
DWP benefits claimant	£12,700	£0	£0	£0	£0
Primary medical care	£200	£200	£200	£200	£200
Secondary medical care	£2,000	£2,000	£2,000	£2,000	£2,000
Totals	£23,420	£10,720	£16,220	£13,970	£10,720

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- There is no legal requirement for the council to engage with the VPR scheme. Central government has set out their undertaking to deliver humanitarian relief and has set out guidance on its delivery and will make funding available for any local authority making an offer of support. The Executive has agreed for the council to be a participating local authority and that a strategy and plans should be put in place to be in a position to make an offer for up to five families.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

- The council as a public body is required to meet its statutory obligations under the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promote equal opportunities between people from different groups and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it. The protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- Under the Equality Act 2010 we are required to have due regard to our equality duties when making decisions, reviewing services, undertaking projects, developing and reviewing policies. Evidence thus far from host communities receiving Syrian refugees indicates that age, disability, marriage, race, faith and gender are all factors that will require attention upon arrival. This highlights the imperative as a minimum for there to be a supportive keyworker in place to respond to the insecurity and fear that a new life in a different culture will bring to these families. Other aspects of need will be identified when families are ascertained for re-location to the Island and appropriate assessment and planning established upon arrival.

SECTION 17 CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998

18. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1988 (as amended by the Police and Justice Act 2006) provides that: "... it shall be the duty of each authority... to exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all it reasonably can to prevent, crime, disorder, anti-social behaviour adversely affecting the environment and substance misuse in its area".
19. Refugees being considered for the VPR scheme are subject to security vetting. Any persons found to represent a risk to the community would not be offered an opportunity for re-settlement.
20. The council and Hampshire Police have responsibilities through the community safety partnership to ensure social cohesion arrangements, for monitoring and responding to the potential impact on community cohesion of the arrival of migrants and refugees. The responsibility is to ensure that all residents can live safely and without fear of crime and that partner's work together to increase community confidence and promote community cohesion. In order to ensure that these responsibilities are met and that the right arrangements are being made in each case, there is a need to assess the local impact of placements with potential host communities. This requires discussion with community leaders and organisations, including faith groups and voluntary organisations with a particular interest and experience in arrivals and our local communities. These discussions have been ongoing since September 2016 and continue to be productive in pursuit of an offer being made for re-settlement.

OPTIONS

21. Option 1: To agree the preparatory work that has been undertaken to improve the council's readiness to respond to refugee re-settlement and to make a formal offer to host up to five families as soon as is feasibly possible.
22. Option 2: To note progress made thus far to improve the council's readiness to respond to refugee re-settlement but take no further action.

RISK MANAGEMENT

23. In the preparation for the report to Executive in September 2016, there was a concern that the council did not have sufficient experience of managing re-settlement programmes for refugees and as such there was a risk that there would be inadequate knowledge to commission and deliver services effectively. It was also considered to be a risk that by not having a strategy or action plan in place to respond, an unmanaged approach would do more harm to arrivals than good and may place them at even greater disadvantage within an unprepared community. However, the actions undertaken since then have enabled a co-ordinated approach to be developed with active engagement of relevant agencies that need to be involved. There has also been an overwhelming response from within the community with offers of help and support. Central government agencies have been a source of significant assistance in developing the necessary knowledge and

understanding of what needs to be done. To that end, it is considered that subject to being in a position to secure suitable accommodation and the appointment of a keyworker, it is feasible to make an offer of re-settlement in the near future.

24. There is a risk that there will be extra demand and pressure placed on already stretched council and NHS services. There is funding available from central government to cover the costs associated with support needs but no extra funding to cover any additional demands that may be created by the specific needs of families. However, numbers of people will be low and it is possible to retain control on the numbers of people to whom offers will be made. In the circumstances being faced by Syrian refugees, the need for humanitarian support is considered to far outweigh any perceived additional pressure on Island services.
25. Identification of suitable housing remains an issue and within the VPR scheme there is a need to secure housing within local benefit rates. This presents a challenge where housing costs are high and local housing markets rarely have suitable accommodation at the housing benefit level. The council is not in a financial position to be able to top-up housing costs to accommodate any difference in rental costs. As a result of the call for offers of properties, it has been reassuring that there have been a number of approaches made from within the Island community that are likely to result in suitable accommodation being identified for the agreed rates.

EVALUATION

26. Executive at its meeting on 6 September 2016, set out its clear intention that the council should undertake an assessment of its readiness to make an offer for the resettlement of Syrian families that have suffered the effects of war and to develop a strategy and action plan to deliver such an offer. Since that point, officer resource has been allocated to undertake the necessary preparatory work, actively engage with a range of agencies, public sector partners and voluntary organisations to assess and identify what wider resources and support may be available to secure a sustainable response to refugee resettlement. Much progress has been made and it is considered that the council is now in a position to make an offer to up to five families in the near future. While there remains some element of risk in doing so, it is considered that there is sufficient community support and resilience to offer a warm welcome to a small number of families with the appropriate infrastructure to afford the necessary support and assistance for integration into a new community. There are still matters to resolve in respect of securing suitable accommodation and to appoint a key worker as fundamental aspects of delivery but it is anticipated that these will be resolved in due course.

RECOMMENDATION

27. Option 1: To agree the preparatory work that has been undertaken to improve the council's readiness to respond to refugee re-settlement and to make a formal offer to host up to five families as soon as is feasibly possible.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

28. Paper F: Ensuring a sustainable local response to national and international migration and refugee resettlement. Executive – 8 September 2016.
<https://www.iwight.com/Meetings/committees/Executive/8-9-16/PAPER%20F.pdf>
29. Minutes of Executive – 8 September 2016
<https://www.iwight.com/Meetings/committees/Executive/8-9-16/minutes.pdf>

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