

EXECUTIVE

LEADER: Cllr Jeremy Christophers

PORTFOLIO HOLDER: Cllr John Goodey

DATE: 10 February 2016

REPORT OF: PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR COMMUNITY & NEIGHBOURHOODS

SUBJECT: SYRIAN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

PART I

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive is recommended to

Resolve

That the Council support six Syrian refugee families.

1. PURPOSE

To agree the Council's response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis.

2. BACKGROUND

National Context

In his statement to the House of Commons on Monday 7 September 2015 the Prime Minister announced that Britain would resettle up to 20,000 Syrian refugees over the life of this Parliament. These refugees will be taken from the camps in the countries neighbouring Syria. The UK has been involved in an existing scheme to resettle refugees for a couple of years, the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) will continue to refer people to the scheme. The UK sets the criteria. It currently prioritises those who cannot be supported effectively in their region of origin: women, children and young people at risk, people in severe need of medical care and survivors of torture and violence, refugees with legal and or physical protection needs, refugees with medical needs or disabilities, persons at risk due to their sexual orientation or gender identity and refugees with family links in resettlement countries. The UNHCR conducts a series of checks including a robust identification process prior to transferring a refugee to the UK scheme. Referrals are then further screened and considered by the Home Office for

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suitability before entry to the UK. The Home Office checks they meet criteria and to carry out medical and security checks.

By the time the UNHCR referred refugee arrives in the UK they have been through a thorough two stage vetting process to ensure government knows who is entering the country. This includes the taking of biometrics, documentary evidence and interviews. Security is also regarded as a continual process that does not stop as soon as a refugee arrives in the UK.

The government has invited local authorities to take part in a Syrian Refugee resettlement programme through the Syrian vulnerable person's relocation scheme.

A local authority which asks to participate in the scheme has cases passed to them by the Home Office. The referral gives detail on the family makeup, age and specific needs. The local authority is asked to confirm whether it can accommodate and support those specific cases. In two tier Devon this is a conversation which will take place in conjunction with the County Council.

On accepting a case, local authorities need to arrange housing, school places etc. In parallel, an arrival date will be agreed. The government provides funding to cover the local costs of housing in receiving the groups arriving. Refugees will be granted a five year humanitarian protection visa. This will enable them to access public funds, labour market and the possibility of a family reunion.

The Home Office has indicated it will seek to ensure an equitable contribution of refugees across the country so no individual local authorities bare a disproportion share of the burden. It is made clear to refugees before they arrive that they could be resettled anywhere in the UK as part of this programme. It is also made clear the refugees will be allocated accommodation of the same standard as that available to UK citizens. As previously mentioned, local authorities can choose whether to participate in this scheme. The scheme will continue to run alongside resettlement schemes and other asylum procedures.

Local Context

The County Council and District Councils across Devon have been having ongoing discussions in recent months to provide the local response to the scheme. Responsibilities lie in different places in two tier areas like Devon (e.g. accommodation sits with District Councils and education and Social care with the County Council, and healthcare with the NHS). This needs careful co-ordination. The County Council is working closely with local statutory and voluntary and community sector partners to provide sufficient support for any refugees.

It is understood that a number of local authorities in Devon have now offered to participate in the Syrian vulnerable person's relocation scheme. Currently, it is understood there are offers for around 25 families to be relocated across the County.

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Members will be aware that a 267 name petition has been received by people across the Devon area for Teignbridge to home 50 refugee families. This has previously been reported to the Council meeting.

It is also fair to say emails have been received both for and against the Council taking part in any resettlement of Syrian refugees.

The arguments put forward in objecting to help the Syrian refugees is that local tax payer's money should not be spent when there are other priorities which those people feel the Council should be addressing. It is a question of balance for the Council in deciding its response.

The government has recently confirmed the funding arrangements for the 5 year period which covers the 5 year humanitarian protection visa leave to remain in the UK. The first 12 months of costs are to be funded by the government's overseas aid budget. The government has now confirmed the funding arrangements for years 2-5.

Teignbridge District Council's role will be the provision of appropriate housing. It is considered that an appropriate option for the Council to consider will be leasing properties from private landlords in the area. The Council currently leases properties from private landlords to accommodate homeless households. This is the most economic form of support but also provides a stable home for refugees. It also does not conflict with the use of social housing for persons on the Devon Home Choice housing register.

Local Housing Market & Support

The housing market in Teignbridge is of relevance in considering the Council's possible response. It suggests that both availability and costs of accommodation, suggest two and three bedroom properties be sought to accept families with two or three children.

Teignbridge has half the national average of social housing which means that we are more reliant on the private rented market to meet the need for rental accommodation in the area and assist us in meeting our statutory homelessness duties. On average we place 3 households in emergency accommodation each week and we currently have 23 households in first stage accommodation (Albany, B&B etc) and a further 15 households in second stage accommodation (private sector lease properties).

Some households have been in PSLs for over 12 months due to the lack of suitable private rented accommodation to move them into.

Given the local housing market and the rural nature of the district, it is considered that an initial number of refugee families to be supported could be somewhere in the region of 6 families. The size of the proposed family groupings would mean that the Council would be helping provide safe sanctuary for up to 30 refugees.

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Leased properties are the recommended housing option

Teignbridge currently leases properties from private landlords to accommodate homeless households. The leased scheme allows for closer management of the tenancies whilst providing households in need with self-contained accommodation.

After 12 months the family move into private rented sector. This may take longer in practice.

Advantages	Risks
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assured level of quality in accommodation and tenancy management• Rents are slightly higher but recouped through benefit subsidy• Increase in current stock advantageous to homeless team if refugees leave area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Potential voids if refugees leave the area however could be used by homeless team.

This model has the approval of the migration partnership to ensure all reasonable costs will be met from central government funds provided to support the refugees.

There would be an option for the Council to consider extending its offer depending on the success of resettlement of the proposed six families.

There are a number of voluntary sector and community groups in the area who would provide support to refugees and refugee families. The government specifies and funds a package of support for arrival and settling in, including language classes and cultural orientation. Devon County Council is coordinating a common support package.

3. MAIN IMPLICATIONS

Should the Council chose to participate in the scheme there is a need to ensure that, due to the vulnerable nature of the refugees that only suitable persons are used in their support and care.

There is also a requirement to retain an element of confidentiality so refugees are able to build their new lives with an appropriate degree of anonymity.

Anticipated financial costs will be covered by central government monies in line with the government's commitment.

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4. TIME-SCALE

It is understood there is a six week period between offer and arrival of refugee families. The offer will need to be co-ordinated by the County Council.

5. JUSTIFICATION

The report sets out a potential humanitarian response to an international problem.

6. DATE OF IMPLEMENTATION (CONFIRMATION OF DECISION SUBJECT TO CALL-IN)

10.00 a.m. on Wednesday, 17 February 2016.

Cllr John Goodey
Portfolio Holder for Community &
Neighbourhoods

Wards affected	Unknown at this stage
Contact for any more information	Neil Aggett – Democratic Services Manager Contact: 01626 215113 Amanda Pujol – Business Manager – Housing & Health Contact: 01626 215301
Background Papers (For Part I reports only)	South West Council's information
Key Decision	N
In Forward Plan	Y
In O&S Work Programme	N
Community Impact Assessment attached:	N
Appendices attached:	Nil