

**CABINET – 23rd NOVEMBER 2016****SYRIAN VULNERABLE PERSONS RESETTLEMENT SCHEME****REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE****PART A****Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS) and the resettlement of families under the Scheme.

Recommendations

2. The Cabinet is asked to note:
 - a) The arrangements put in place by the County Council and partners to support the placement to date of six families from Syria;
 - b) Ongoing discussions with the district councils to review the governance arrangements and to ensure the allocation of the SVPRS funding for social care and education costs are in line with Government guidance.

Reasons for Recommendations

3. To ensure that the Cabinet is aware of the latest position regarding the SVPRS, and to seek to ensure the Scheme is appropriately governed and properly deploys Government funding.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

4. There is no specific deadline but early resolution of governance arrangements and funding allocations is desirable.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

5. The Government has committed to take in and support up to 20,000 refugees over the life of this Parliament. The County Council has agreed to respond and assist refugees as helpfully and positively as it can whilst recognising that its capacity to assist will be governed by available resources.

Resource Implications

6. There are no resource implications directly arising from this report. Refugee households arriving in Leicestershire will require support from a range of services, including those provided by the County Council. As set out in Part B of this report below the Government is making funding available to help cover these costs and it is important that this is deployed in a manner which most effectively meets the needs of refugee households, and is consistent with Government guidance. There are concerns, detailed below, as to how Charnwood Borough Council (which is acting as the district lead authority for the SVPRS) proposes to deal with social care costs incurred by the County Council in support of resettled Syrian refugee households.
7. Separately, the County Council is pressing the Local Government Association in its discussions with the Government to ensure that the funding for the SVPRS Scheme is sufficient, i.e. on a full cost basis, and sustainable in order to minimise financial and other resource pressures on local authorities, particularly the budget for children's social care.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

None.

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PART B

Background

8. The Government has resolved to resettle up to 20,000 Syrian refugees in the UK by the end of this Parliament, under the SVPRS.
9. The primary purpose is to resettle 20,000 vulnerable Syrian persons from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in a way that ensures national security and public protection, has the wellbeing of the vulnerable persons and welcoming communities at the centre of decision-making, and delivers value for money for the UK taxpayer.
10. The SVPRS is run in partnership with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and is intended to demonstrate 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.
11. The beneficiaries of the scheme must have registered with the UNHCR in Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt or other countries across the MENA region as a result of the current crisis and the UNHCR must consider them to meet one of their seven vulnerability criteria to be eligible for the Scheme, which are -
 - Women and girls at risk
 - Survivors of violence and 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
 - Refugees with family links in resettlement countries
12. The Cabinet on 11th September 2015 agreed to support the Government in its aim to resettle vulnerable Syrian families. (Note the SVPRS is a separate scheme to the National Transfer Scheme in respect of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) which is the subject of a separate report on this agenda.)

Resettlement of Families in Leicestershire

13. The first two families arrived in September and were housed in Loughborough.
14. At the end of November a further four families are expected and they will be housed in North West Leicestershire and Melton.
15. At this stage, the local offer from the district councils is to take families in the lowest category of need. However, given the background and experience of these families it is likely that they may still have significant support requirements. Arrangements are in place for social care assessments to be

undertaken if and when referrals are made by family support workers, schools and others.

Local Implementation and allocation of SVPR Funding

16. As reported previously to the Cabinet in October, Charnwood Borough Council is leading the scheme in Leicestershire and Rutland and has employed a SVPR Scheme Co-ordinator. Charnwood is seeking to co-ordinate the securing of properties and to procure support services for resettled families on behalf of all the district councils and Rutland Council. The County Council is liaising with the Scheme Co-ordinator on the provision of relevant services, including providing advice on accessing school places, and social care support.
17. Concerns about the approach taken by Charnwood Borough Council were reported to the Cabinet at its meeting on 16th September. Its decision, which is set out below, was communicated to Charnwood and the other Leicestershire district councils.
 - a) *That the County Council remains committed to assist in the resettlement locally of families under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS) in keeping with its previous decision and will provide support in accordance with its responsibilities;*
 - b) *That it is regrettable that the key issue of social care costs remains unresolved and that the County Council's dealings with Charnwood Borough Council, who are co-ordinating the response to the SVPRS of the district councils as housing authorities, have not been productive;*
 - c) *That the recognition by Charnwood Borough Council officers on 13th September that Government funding to support the SVPRS can be used for social care costs, a change from Charnwood's previous position, is welcomed, but the arrangements for and level of reimbursement need clarification taking account of advice from the Regional Strategic Migration Partnership, the Local Government Association and the Home Office;*
 - d) *That a unilateral decision by district council officers to draft and sign memoranda of understanding directly affecting the County Council is unacceptable;*
 - e) *That the County Council would expect a change of view from district councils in regard to the local governance of the SVPRS, where their decisions currently exclude the County Council and elected members;*
 - f) *That no memorandum of understanding will be considered or signed by the County Council until the County Council is satisfied as to arrangements in respect of governance and funding;*
 - g) *That the County Council's response to the Government's National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children and the Government's Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme, which carry significant financial and other consequences for the County Council, and which will be the subject of a report to the next Cabinet meeting, will be considered alongside the ongoing response to the SVPRS;*
 - h) *That a copy of this resolution be sent to all district councils.*

18. The Government published a Funding Instruction earlier in the year for Year 1 of the SVPRS as to how its funding should be allocated locally, including for housing, social care and education costs. This was a Funding Instruction only for 2016/17. The County Council disagreed with Charnwood Borough Council's view that social care funding payable to the County Council should be limited. It is the County Council's view that the entirety of the funding made available by the Government can be used to support the full range of eligible services which includes social care, and that appropriate governance arrangements need to be in place to manage the allocation of resources. That position is reflected in the Cabinet resolution set out above. Recently the Government has issued the Funding Instruction for Years 2-5 of the SVPRS. Helpfully, this is very clear that Government funding should not be ringfenced and emphasises the importance of flexibility. It therefore confirms the County Council's view as correct.
19. No response was received to the Cabinet resolution until a response from Charnwood was received on 4th November. An invitation to the County Council to meet with some district councils and the co-ordinator of the Regional Migration Partnership, at which Charnwood would be present, had previously been extended by Blaby District Council, and took place on 7th November. Some progress was made in respect of funding and governance, but nothing has yet been formally agreed by the district councils or Charnwood as the lead authority, and a further meeting is planned to reach agreement on specific governance and funding arrangements.

Conclusion

20. The County Council is committed to play an active and positive role in supporting the resettlement of Syrian refugees. It is regrettable that the County Council was not consulted or involved in governance and grant distribution arrangements proposed by Charnwood Borough Council. Whilst a formal response from Charnwood and/or the district councils is awaited, the concerns set out in the Cabinet's resolution of 16th September remain.

Background Papers

Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme - Guidance for local authorities and partners

<http://ow.ly/2G1u303Ydns>

Report to the Cabinet on 11th September 2015 "Refugees - The Prime Minister's Statement of 7th September 2015 and the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme" and minutes of that meeting

<http://ow.ly/3C4S303YdrA>

<http://ow.ly/eDPH303YdAH>

Report to the Cabinet on 16th September 2016 "Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme"

<http://ow.ly/EIV6305Yf7K>

Equality and Human Rights Implications

21. The County Council is committed to promoting equality and human rights. Responding positively to the humanitarian crisis in Syria is consistent with this commitment.
22. Beneficiaries of the scheme will access County Council services using the same processes as other residents accessing the same services. To mitigate the possible negative impact of language and cultural barriers, the beneficiaries will have the support of a keyworker in making referrals for any appropriate support. The beneficiaries will have English language tuition (ESOL or equivalent) to be able to carry out basic transactions within the communities within which they have been placed, should they require it, and interpretation services will be available throughout the period of resettlement.
23. These mitigations are to be coordinated by Charnwood Borough Council and this level of casework support is a requirement of the scheme. Contact has been made with Charnwood Borough Council as the lead on the scheme to establish whether it has completed an Equality Impact Assessment. The SVPR Scheme Co-ordinator has agreed to contact the Home Office to establish whether an impact assessment has been completed on the whole scheme. The County Council services that are likely to be accessed will have been subject to an Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment previously to ensure that there is not a disproportionately adverse impact on any persons with protected characteristics.