

Cabinet
18 June 2015**6. SYRIAN VULNERABLE PERSONS RELOCATION SCHEME****Relevant Cabinet Member**

Mr A I Hardman

Relevant Officer

Director of Commercial and Change

Recommendations

1. **The Leader recommends that:**

(a) Cabinet recommends to Council that the Notice of Motion is not supported at this stage due to the financial implications, unquantifiable risks and that there is no guarantee of funding from Government beyond the first year and in the light of (b) below; and

(b) Cabinet agrees that the scheme continues to be monitored and the situation reviewed should the funding arrangements from the Home Office change and any decision to progress the scheme be delegated to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Transformation and Commissioning.

Background Information

2. On 12 February 2015, the Council referred the following Notice of Motion to Cabinet for advice:

"The County Council wishes to play its part in the humanitarian relief programme for Syria by responding to the UK Government's call for local authorities to host small numbers of refugee families – doing so by asking the relevant Cabinet Members with Responsibility to consider providing their support and expertise to a Malvern Hills District Council-led initiative to host up to twelve such families.

We would ask Cabinet Members with Responsibility to consider committing to working collaboratively with Malvern Hills District Council and other local agencies, initially to develop a support framework and strategy as the basis of an application to the Home Office's Syrian Vulnerable Persons' Relocation Scheme (and, if successful, to participate in the implementation of the strategy by receiving, welcoming and supporting Syrian families through their process of resettlement)."

3. The UN estimates that as of February 2015, 12.2 million people are in need of humanitarian aid within Syria. At least 7.6 million people in Syria have been forced to flee their homes and there are some 3.8 million refugees in neighbouring countries. On 29 January 2014, the Home Secretary made a statement to Parliament outlining the Government's intention to relocate to the UK some of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees, displaced to neighbouring countries by the ongoing conflict.

4. The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) Scheme runs in parallel with the Government's existing refugee resettlement programme – Gateway. However, those people relocated to the UK under the new scheme are in addition to those the UK resettles each year through Gateway. The Home Office are therefore seeking additional local authorities to participate in the VPR scheme.

5. This is the biggest refugee crisis for a generation and as a local authority we want to look at how we can play our part in supporting some of the most vulnerable individuals to rebuild their lives and integrate into local communities.

6. The scheme is based on need rather than being designed to meet a quota. The Home Office originally anticipated a total of 500 people over a period of three years. Within the first nine months of the scheme 143 Syrians were relocated to the UK.

7. Those who are accepted under the VPR Scheme are granted humanitarian protection giving them leave to remain for 5 years with full access to employment and public funds and rights to family reunion comparable to refugees. At the end of the 5 years, if they have not been able to return to Syria, they may be eligible to apply for settlement in the UK.

8. Local authorities take the lead in working with other key local partners, including primary and secondary healthcare providers and housing providers to ensure that arrivals are provided with suitable accommodation and the specific needs of these vulnerable individuals are met. They will need to bring in specialist support providers subject to individuals' specific requirements.

9. In advance of the first arrivals local authorities and their partners will receive a briefing from the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism's Prevent Unit and other regional and local Prevent leads particularly to raise awareness of potential signs of radicalisation.

10. Local authorities are required to provide the Home Office with a number of families they would be willing to receive. There is no minimum on how many families a local authority can pledge to receive, but the Home Office recognise that it may not be cost effective for local authorities unless they

Arrivals

The role of Local Authorities in this scheme

Funding

receive a certain number.

11. Central Government will meet the costs of the arrivals in terms of orientation support, health and education costs for the first year from arrival.

12. Central government funding will cover a range of measures to assist the support and orientation of this group for one year only including travel, one-off cash, £600 towards primary care costs, education and social care.

13. Particularly given the specific requirements of this group, this list is not definitive and local authorities would need to negotiate more funding if they consider there are other elements not covered here that would require funding.

14. Not included with this funding will be any initial costs for co-ordinating efforts of all partners before commencing the scheme. For example, one officer employed on scale PO1 working 20 hours per week for a period of six months would be in the region of £11,000.

Financial Implications beyond initial 12 months

15. The makeup and needs of each family will differ from case to case and therefore it is difficult to accurately forecast costs incurred following the initial Home Office funding.

16. There is a Government expectation that future costs will need to be covered through mainstream funding and welfare benefits.

17. As many of these refugees and families will have gone through a traumatic experience, it is widely anticipated that the Syrian refugees will require substantial support for health, social care and education well beyond the first 12 months after their arrival.

18. Based on demographics of families that have been supported by the scheme we have been able to make some assumptions on indicative costs that are likely to be incurred.

19. The following example additional costs have been based on receiving twelve families:

- Provision of additional integration and orientation support for a further 12 months. This includes one full time social worker (level 3) and one area manager (PO4) based on 2015/16 figures for adult social care posts. Total cost is approximately **£100,000**
- Early Help Assessment: It is estimated a minimum of two assessments may be required which would total about **£5,000** for 6 month assessments.
- It is estimated that two individuals may require

services related to mental Health. Figures taken from the Unit Cost Database show that this could come at a cost to the authority of **£5,000** and increase for more complex needs.

20. Although difficult to quantify, it is therefore estimated that the cost for supporting the scheme ongoing could be between **£100,000 - £150,000 per annum** which would significantly increase if families turn out to have more complex needs than anticipated.

21. The costs for the County Council may significantly rise if any individuals need to be placed in a care setting. For example, the average fiscal cost to the local authority across different types of care setting of a child taken into care is in excess of £45,000 per year. This figure could be as high as £200,000 should external agency residential placement be required. There will also be financial implications for partner organisations, for example where housing support is required beyond the initial 12 months or where additional health provision is required for individuals who have long-term medical needs. In addition, there is likely to be ongoing costs for ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) provision and/or interpreting services which will need to be funded.

22. Partner organisations such as the South Worcestershire CCG have indicated that they would be supportive of the scheme but would struggle to fund any additional costs. Likewise Worcestershire Health & Care NHS Trust whilst supportive of the scheme, have concerns about the level of health need – particularly in relation to mental health services given the potentially traumatic experiences that some of the families may have been exposed to. The Trust would not be able to respond to this level of need beyond a very small number of individuals without some additional funding and/or support from the CCGs without which would limit their ability to respond. Malvern Hills District Council has resolved to play a part in this initiative however at this moment there is no financial commitment from the council to support the scheme.

Risks

23. Supporting the scheme has an element of financial risk that is difficult to quantify at this stage. This could be potentially mitigated to some extent by only agreeing to accept families that pose the lowest risk to needing long-term social care; however, given the criteria for admission, this would be difficult to predict due to the vulnerable nature of the families resettled through the scheme.

24. There are currently no guarantees that any costs to the local authority and other service providers will be funded beyond the first year and therefore funding would need to be found from within existing budgets.

Conclusion

25. It has been reported that some local authorities feel that the current package of support provided from the Government is insufficient and that the full cost implications over the longer term aren't being acknowledged. They have expressed that more funding guarantees are needed before they can agree to take on the refugees. We will therefore continue to review the willingness of Government to cover the full costs and risks.

26. There are significant financial implications for the Council and other local public sector organisations in participating in the scheme. Individuals are granted humanitarian protection giving them the leave to remain for a minimum of 5 years. Funding is only provided by Government for the first year of the scheme, with the exception of certain medical cases, and there is no financial support beyond this.

27. Evidence suggests that substantial support will be required well beyond the first 12 months after their arrival which will need to be met from within existing budgets. These costs are estimated to be significantly higher during the second year of the scheme as a result of the continued orientation support that will need to be provided.

28. There is a likelihood that additional costs for social care will need to be met beyond the second year; however it is difficult to determine at this stage to what extent without undertaking additional assessments of the individuals during the first year.

29. It is important to acknowledge the plight of the Syrian refugees. In the current financial climate it is however difficult to justify signing up to an unquantifiable financial risk that could have long-term implications. Participating in the scheme also should not be to the detriment to our existing residents who need to remain our first priority.

30. On this basis it is therefore recommended that Council does not support the Notice of Motion at this stage. However, it is recommended that we continue to monitor the scheme and review our position should the funding arrangements from the Home Office change.

Contact Points

County Council Contact Points

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Background Papers

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In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Chief Executive) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

Agenda papers for the meeting of County Council held on 12 February 2015