

To: City Executive Board
Date: 17 December 2015
Report of: Assistant Chief Executive
Title of Report: Resettling Syrian Refugees in Oxford

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To provide an update on progress in accommodating Syrian Refugees in Oxford through the Government's Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme and to approve proposals to accommodate Syrian Refugees in Oxford.

Key decision Yes

Executive lead member: Cllr Bob Price, Leader of the Council

Policy Framework: The Corporate Plan: Stronger and Active Communities

Recommendation(s): That the City Executive Board resolves to:

1. approve the participation in the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme for the purpose of settling refugee families in Oxford on the terms set out in the body of the report.
2. delegate authority to the Assistant Chief Executive, to make any necessary arrangements for effective participation within the above Scheme.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Summary of agreed Motion to Council and actions taken

Appendix 2: Risk Register

Appendix 3: Equalities Impact Assessment

Overview

1. On 23 September 2015 Council agreed a motion on Oxford as a City of Sanctuary for refugees and asylum seekers. That motion included a

commitment to work with the Home Office to implement the extended Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. This report provides an update on progress with that work and sets out proposals for Oxford City Council's participation in the scheme.

Update on Home Office arrangements for resettling Syrian Refugees

2. Following the Prime Minister's announcement in September that Britain should resettle up to 20,000 Syrian refugees over the course of the Parliament, the Home Office has confirmed details of the expansion of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme.
3. They have confirmed:
 - The expanded scheme is now underway and is expected to scale up to accept several hundred refugees each month over the course of the Parliament. They are expecting to accommodate around 1,000 households before the end of December. They are looking to Local Authorities to come forward with offers to accommodate households through the scheme.
 - Refugees will arrive in small numbers on standard flights.
 - UNHCR are referring more cases for the UK to take - the criteria have been widened and the process shortened. Priority will be given to women and children at risk, people in severe need of medical care and survivors of torture and violence. It is not expected that refugees arriving in the first months of the scheme will include unaccompanied children.
 - Local authorities participating in the scheme will be asked to consider cases that have been referred on a case by case basis to allow them to assess the needs and requirements.
 - The Home Office and Regional Migration Partnerships are working with local authorities to assist in developing their plans for accommodating refugees.
4. It has been confirmed that funding will be available to support refugees for the first year of their stay. In response to concerns from local authorities and the LGA about funding for the full duration of the scheme, Richard Harrington MP, the Minister for Syrian Refugees wrote to Local Authorities on 2 October to confirm that there will be funding for refugees beyond the first 12 months, though the detail of this funding has yet to be confirmed.

Oxford City Council Proposals to accommodate Syrian Refugees

5. The City Council has been working with neighbouring councils, health services and voluntary groups to develop arrangements for accommodating refugees arriving through the scheme in our area.
6. The City Council has established a coordination group bringing together voluntary, community and faith groups to build on their experience and expertise in developing arrangements for refugees and coordinate support and services. This group has developed a directory mapping the

resources, services and offers of help from individuals and businesses. This has also identified where support could be expanded with additional resource and we will explore how these needs might be met.

7. Following this work, the City Council has developed proposals to accommodate an initial 10 households under the scheme in the coming months to test systems and help to develop a longer term county-wide offer. The proposal is for a phased approach with the first households arriving from December 2015. It is proposed that the operational arrangements are reviewed in 2016 to assess future capacity to accommodate more households; agree any refinements needed to the support; take account of developments in the national scheme and confirmation of longer term funding arrangements.
8. In developing our proposals we have had regard to the formal requirements of the Government's scheme. We have been advised and have worked closely with experienced individuals and agencies in the not for profit, voluntary, community and faith groups in the City, in the design of these proposals.

Proposal

9. The support provided under the proposal consists of,:
 - Resettlement Support
 - Housing Provision
 - Housing Support
 - Social Care
10. We are working with the County Council to ensure that other elements of support required by the scheme (education and medical care) will be in place.

Resettlement Support

11. The Council is working with the local voluntary sector to develop a contract to provide this element of the package. This approach would seek to harness existing skills and resources in welcoming asylum seekers and refugees, and help integrate this initiative with individuals in the community that have offered volunteer help and support.
12. The offer includes intensive support and resettlement to families on arrival and during their first weeks in the country. Support is then expected to be given during a short handover period to a floating support agency.
13. On-going support may also be provided by voluntary and community groups after this time, including activities to enable people to support each other and cultural integration, as part of the usual working arrangements of the voluntary agency. The Council would seek to continue to provide

additional support through its grant and community development support processes.

Housing Provision

14. Our work has included an assessment of options for accommodation. It is a requirement that authorities participating in the scheme provide affordable and sustainable accommodation for people arriving under the scheme. Given the high demand and lack of availability of affordable and social housing in Oxford and Oxfordshire we need to ensure that provision of accommodation does not negatively impact on existing households in need of housing in the City. The high rental costs and competition for housing in our area means that our ability to accommodate refugee families depends on government funding the costs of securing appropriate accommodation from private landlords or Agents in Oxford or the immediate vicinity.

Housing Support

15. The Council will seek to enter into contract with a specialist floating support agency, to provide personalised integration support for these families in their first year, following the initial resettlement (during the first week) so that they have the best chance of coping independently at the end of the year.

Social Care

16. Social Care provision will be accessible as per any person in the community. It is expected that some children will require an assessment for early intervention assistance. Where there are exceptional costs associated with social care it will be possible to negotiate top-up funding from government.

Financial implications

17. The Home Office have confirmed that Local Authorities will receive £8,520 per person in Year 1 for the costs of resettlement, orientation and welcome package, accommodation and social care needs. This excludes education, DWP and medical costs which will be funded separately. We have evaluated the provisional cost of our proposal, in terms of Housing provision, support and securing Voluntary Sector support services and are confident that the programme will be cost neutral in year 1.
18. The Home Office have also confirmed that costs of the scheme in future years will be funded by Government, though the details have yet to be confirmed. Likely costs for subsequent years are uncertain, but should reasonably be expected to include housing costs (top-up of the difference between market and LHA rates); on-going cultural support; housing/tenancy sustainment support; and any continuing social care costs. We

will work with them to ensure that it covers the costs of the scheme in future years. The proposed review of the scheme in 2016 will enable us to assess this before offering to accept further households

Environmental Impact

19. There is no environmental impact

Level of Risk

20. See appendix 2.

Equalities Impact

21. See appendix 3

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List of background papers: None

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