

Initial Equalities Impact Assessment screening form

Prior to making the decision, the Council's decision makers considered the following: guide to decision making under the Equality Act 2010:

*The Council is a public authority. All public authorities when exercising public functions are caught by the Equality Act 2010 which became law in December 2011. In making any decisions and proposals, the Council - specifically members and officers - are required to have **due regard** to the 9 protected characteristics defined under the Act. These protected characteristics are: **age, disability, race, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and marriage & civil partnership***

The decision maker(s) must specifically consider those protected by the above characteristics:

- (a) To seek to ensure equality of treatment towards service users and employees;*
- (b) To identify the potential impact of the proposal or decision upon them.*

The Council will also ask that officers specifically consider whether:

- (A) The policy, strategy or spending decisions could have an impact on safeguarding and / or the welfare of children and vulnerable adults*
- (B) The proposed policy / service is likely to have any significant impact on mental wellbeing / community resilience (staff or residents)*

If the Council fails to give 'due regard', the Council is likely to face a Court challenge. This will either be through a judicial review of its decision making, the decision may be quashed and/or returned for it to have to be made again, which can be costly and time-consuming diversion for the Council. When considering 'due regard', decision makers must consider the following principles:

- 1. **The decision maker is responsible for identifying whether there is an issue and discharging it.** The threshold for one of the duties to be triggered is low and will be triggered where there is any issue which needs at least to be addressed.*
- 2. **The duties arise before the decision or proposal is made, and not after and are ongoing.** They require **advance** consideration by the policy decision maker with conscientiousness, rigour and an open mind. The duty is similar to an open consultation process.*
- 3. The decision maker must be **aware of the needs of the duty.***
- 4. **The impact of the proposal or decision must be properly understood first.** The amount of regard due will depend on the individual circumstances of each case. The greater the potential impact, the greater the regard.*
- 5. **Get your facts straight first!** There will be no due regard at all if the decision maker or those advising it make a fundamental error of fact (e.g. because of failing to properly inform yourself about the impact of a particular decision).*
- 6. What does 'due regard' entail?*
 - a. **Collection and consideration of data and information;***
 - b. **Ensuring data is sufficient to assess the decision/any potential discrimination/ensure equality of opportunity;***
 - c. **Proper appreciation of the extent, nature and duration of the proposal or decision.***
- 7. **Responsibility** for discharging can't be delegated or sub-contracted (although an equality impact assessment ("EIA") can be undertaken by officers, decision makers must be sufficiently aware of the outcome).*

8. **Document the process of having due regard! Keep records and make it transparent! If in any doubt carry out an equality impact assessment (“EIA”), to test whether a policy will impact differentially or not. Evidentially an EIA will be the best way of defending a legal challenge. See hyperlink for the questions you should consider**
<http://occweb/files/seealsodocs/93561/Equalities%20-%20Initial%20Equality%20Impact%20Assessment%20screening%20template.doc>
1. Within the aims and objectives of the policy or strategy which group (s) of people has been identified as being potentially disadvantaged by your proposals? What are the equality impacts?

The Vulnerable Person Relocation (VPR) scheme aims to provide a structured and phased programme of resettlement for the most vulnerable refugees living in camps on the borders of Syria.

Selection is based on the following criteria: ‘women and girls at risk; survivors of violence and/or 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; and refugees with family links in resettlement countries’.

It is proposed that the Council participates in the scheme to resettle ten refugee Households in a phased approach over the next ten months, with the first two families being received before the end of December 2015.

The Council would need to meet the Home Office requirements of the Vulnerable Person Relocation scheme. This would involve meeting and greeting the refugee households; arranging translation services and self-contained furnished accommodation with basic white goods; providing or commissioning services with appropriately trained staff to deliver casework plans of integration support that include help with registering with GPs, schools, Job Centres; applying for Biometric Residence Permits; and accessing welfare benefits, banking services and English language courses. The work would be undertaken with Oxfordshire County Council and the voluntary and faith sectors.

2. In brief, what changes are you planning to make to your current or proposed new or changed policy, strategy, procedure, project or service to minimise or eliminate the adverse equality impacts?

Please provide further details of the proposed actions, timetable for making the changes and the person(s) responsible for making the changes on the resultant action plan

The VPR scheme fits into the Council’s corporate priorities: Stronger Communities (Breaking the Cycle of Deprivation, Educational Attainment, participation and

engagement).

Refugee households are likely to need additional help and support to integrate within the local community and to improve their overall wellbeing. This presents opportunities across the local community to welcome and support refugee households and work closely together to promote community spirit. The Council will ensure support is delivered appropriately, e.g. that welcoming resettlement is provided through contracting with the local voluntary sector (Asylum Welcome, Refugee Assistance et al), and to ensure intensive support from the point of arrival

The Council would through the support plan for each refugee commission specialist services to meet their specific identified needs. The planning and preparation stage has ensured that the appropriate services are ready and co-ordinated and that all relevant staff have received training.

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.

3. Please provide details of whom you will consult on the proposed changes and if you do not plan to consult, please provide the rationale behind that decision.

Please note that you are required to involve disabled people in decisions that impact on them

Stakeholders have not been involved with this equalities impact assessment. However, planning and preparation work has been undertaken with Oxfordshire County Council, health and the voluntary and faith sectors.

The City Council aims to ensure the immediate welfare of the Syrian refugees and that they are supported in a sustainable way in the longer term. 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.

The Council has:

- *Continued to coordinate the work of local charities, voluntary bodies and the public authorities in the Oxford area to ensure that there are effective procedures in place to welcome refugees of all ages and to offer appropriate housing and support.*
- *Continued to encourage people in Oxford and the wider county to make financial donations to support the charities and voluntary bodies involved*
- *Worked with the Home Office to implement the extended Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation scheme*

Written to the City's Universities encouraging them to consider extending their funded studentships to include more places specifically for refugees

4. Can the adverse impacts you identified during the initial screening be justified without making any adjustments to the existing or new policy, strategy, procedure, project or service?

Please set out the basis on which you justify making no adjustments

Refugee households will need additional help and support to integrate within the local community and to improve their overall wellbeing.

The rehousing of some homeless families that the Council has a responsibility to and is looking to re-house will not be delayed as refugee families are accommodated and resettled. This is both due to the small number of families being assisted under this scheme locally and also because the properties they will access for housing will be private rented accommodation at market rates that would not be affordable or sustainable for homeless households.

There is additional and confirmed central government funding to cover costs in the first year of the resettlement programme, with an announcement expected following the Spending Review to confirm funding for year 2 to 5.

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.

Resettled households will have the opportunity in the long term to contribute to the local economy through employment and voluntary work.

5. You are legally required to monitor and review the proposed changes after implementation to check they work as planned and to screen for unexpected equality impacts.

Please provide details of how you will monitor/evaluate or review your proposals and when the review will take place

We propose to take 10 households in a phased process over a 10 month period. An initial phase of receiving two families before the end of December 2015. It is proposed that the operational arrangements are reviewed by the mid-point of this approach (in 2016); to both agree any refinements in-year, and also to best inform the approach in future years.

Our understanding from the Home Office is that Local Authorities will receive £8,520 per person in Year 1 for the costs of resettlement, orientation and welcome package, housing and social care needs. Education, DWP and medical costs will be funded in addition to the £8,520. We have evaluated the provisional cost of our proposal, in terms of Housing provision, support and securing Voluntary Sector support services and the programme will be cost neutral in the first year. 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.

Lead officer responsible for signing off the EqIA:

Role:

Date:

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