

**HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP
3 DECEMBER 2019**

SYRIAN VULNERABLE PERSONS RESETTLEMENT SCHEME (SVPRS)

Cabinet Member(s): Councillor Simon Clist
Responsible Officer: Mrs Claire Fry, Group Manager for Housing Services

Reason for Report: To provide an update to the Policy Development Group on Provision of Housing for Syrian Refugees in Mid Devon

RECOMMENDATION: That the report be noted

Financial Implications: The Council recharges Devon County Council for the work required to deliver housing management services to those housed by the scheme. The Resettlement Co-ordinator working with Refugee Support Devon is also funded through the scheme. The Council's duties associated with homelessness are funded through the General Fund. The arrangement via a lettings agency means the Housing Options team will not be directly involved. So ensuring the commitment of available resources to statutory obligations relating to the prevention and management of homelessness.

Legal Implications: There is no statutory duty for the Council to participate in the resettlement programme.

Risk Assessment: The Council is contracting with a lettings agency to deliver a third property for use by refugees as part of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Refugee Scheme. This agency is wholly owned by another local authority and this provides a large degree of assurance that landlord and tenant relations will be well managed.

Equality Impact Assessment: Single people are not housed due to the fact that it was agreed that the Council would work with families. A household may include individuals of different ages and different generations. Those housed through the scheme may experience isolation as their religious and cultural needs cannot necessarily be met in rural areas. The support provided by Council Officers and the Refugee Support worker is designed to mitigate the risk of this.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: The Council is working in partnership with Devon County Council and other agencies in connection with this scheme. This work involves support to ensure safeguarding and protection for vulnerable people

Impact on Climate Change: Whilst Officers will endeavour to plan their work in advance in order to minimise environmental impact, there will be times when they have to visit refugee families in order to respond to a pressing matter. In such cases, this work must take priority and will involve an unplanned journey to and from a property which cannot necessarily be organised to coincide with other visits elsewhere within the District.

1.0 Introduction/Background

- 1.1 Local authorities in Devon have agreed to work together to support the Government's pledge to bring vulnerable refugees who have fled Syria due to conflict to the United Kingdom, sought refuge in countries around Syria and who are registered with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).
- 1.2 The UNHCR identifies individuals and families who are particularly vulnerable for medical and other reasons.
- 1.3 The Government's resettlement programme provides funding to Councils for housing and other resettlement costs including English classes, interpreting and help into work.
- 1.4 In Devon, it was agreed that second tier Councils should work in partnership with the County Council, which would lead on work relating to the programme.
- 1.5 At the meeting of the Policy Development Group (PDG) on 17 January 2017, the Head of Housing and Property Services sought agreement to two recommendations relating to the Devon County Council led resettlement programme for refugees.
- 1.6 The PDG agreed to recommend to the Cabinet that:
 - 1.6.1 Up to 5 refugee families are housed / supported, as and when properties come forward, for the duration of the scheme providing the costs are met by the Devon County Council (DCC) led resettlement programme and that this be reviewed four months after the arrival of the first family (Note: the programme was to be of 4 years duration at that point).
 - 1.6.2 These refugee families be accommodated in Private Sector accommodation. However, further consideration must be given to the need for support (help) which would involve a minimum of weekly visits by one or more officers and also an exit strategy involving the landlord, the Council and DCC.
- 1.7 Currently, two refugee families have moved into the District under the SVPRS and their tenancies are managed by Officers in our Housing Options team.

2.0 **The Provision of an Additional Property within the SVPRS in Mid Devon**

3.0 Another landlord came forward some months ago to make a property in Crediton available for refugees. However, issues relating to the resourcing of work to deliver the statutory obligations arising from homelessness legislation precluded the Housing Options team from taking on any additional duties.

4.0 The Communities team at DCC co-ordinates the SVPRS work across the County. Following discussions with this team and the other local authorities in Devon which participate in the scheme, agreement was reached relating to a new model of management for any additional properties coming into the scheme in Mid Devon.

5.0 Another local authority has set up a lettings agency which provides a full property management service to private landlords, for a fee. It has been agreed that the Council should contract with this lettings agency in connection with the third property which has been offered to the SVPRS in Mid Devon.

6.0 In such cases, any management fees can be claimed back through the scheme managed by DCC.

7.0 The lettings agency has been liaising with the landlord of the third property and has undertaken a property inspection. They will be sending the landlord a sole agency agreement for signature in the near future. After that, they will be contacting the Home Office with a view to arranging for a refugee family to move into the property during January 2020.

8.0 We will monitor the outcomes of this with a view to using the same management arrangements if any further properties are identified which can be used to support the SVPRS.

9.0 **Recommendation**

10.0 Members of the PDG are recommended to note the report.

Contact for more Information: Mrs Claire Fry, Group Manager for Housing Services, tel: 01884 234920, email: cfry@middevon.gov.uk

Circulation of the Report: Councillor Simon Clist

List of Background Papers: