

HOUSING SERVICES: SYRIAN VULNERABLE PERSONS SCHEME

Cabinet Member(s): Cllr Ray Stanley
Responsible Officer: Nick Sanderson, Head of Housing & Property Services

Reason for Report: The report provides an overview of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons' Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS), and possible implications for the Council. The Refugee Working Group met on 22nd November 2016, and this topic was discussed in detail at this meeting in accordance with the first recommendation from the Homes Policy Development Group (PDG).

RECOMMENDATION: That the Cabinet recommends to the Council that up to five refugee families are housed/ supported for the duration of the scheme, providing the costs are met by the Devon County Council (DCC)-led resettlement programme. (Note: the programme is currently of 5 years duration)

These refugee families will be accommodated in Private Sector accommodation. However, further consideration must be given to the need for support (help) which will involve a minimum of weekly visits by one or more Officers; and also an exit strategy involving the landlord, the Council and DCC.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: The Council will be working with local communities together with Town and Parish Councils, to enable them to provide a stronger community.

Financial Implications: As detailed within the report, where it will explain what impact the SVRPS will have on the Council's current service provisions and costings. Other financial implications will involve Officer-time setting up the scheme; and ongoing costs are outlined later in the report. With a reducing grant from Central Government, this Authority, like others, is currently reviewing service provision. Any costings for this project (the SVRPS) will have a detrimental impact upon budgets.

Legal Implications: There is no Statutory Duty for the Council to participate in the resettlement programme although mandatory quotas could be introduced, for example, through the Immigration Bill 2015/2016, in the event that there are not enough places available nationally.

All families who move into Mid Devon through the SVPRS will have leave to remain in the country.

The Council will need to have a legal agreement with the landlords offering the Private Sector Leased (PSL) accommodation, setting out respective roles and responsibilities. This work can be done in-house by the Legal Service but will need to be resourced, which may impact upon the day to day work of the Solicitors and other Officers in the Service.

Risk Assessment: Risk assessments for families placed into accommodation under the SVPRS will be made by the Officers working on that scheme, the Home Office and the Border Agency. There is an associated risk with PSL properties where the landlord agrees to let their property to people being rehoused under the SVPRS and where that tenant and their household move out before the end of their tenancy. The situation could arise whereby the Council could be left with a property that is unusable as the Agreement with the landlord will be based upon the provisions of the SVPRS which specifies that the minimum let will be 5 years. Generally, if PSL properties are to be let to people who are homeless and for whom the Council has accepted a homeless duty, a shorter tenancy would be expected.

When the scheme comes to an end, the property will require repairs and/or decorating. Responsibility for routine maintenance is likely to rest with the Council. Robust housing management procedures must be implemented to ensure compliance with tenancy conditions and to minimise damage.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 At the full Council meeting on 31st August 2016, motion 527 was referred to the PDG stating “That this Council supports the Syrian Vulnerable Person’s Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS) as detailed and commits to working with the private sector to achieve placements”.
- 1.2 A presentation was given to the PDG on 15th November 2016 indicating some of the potential financial impacts of the scheme. The PDG recommended setting up a working group for the SVPRS.
- 1.3 On 22nd November 2016, further information was presented to the working group by the Housing Options Manager together with a representative from the SVPRS at DCC, who gave an update on the current progress across the county; and an opportunity for the working group to ask questions.
- 1.4 The Housing Options Manager talked about the financial impacts and the minimum costings over the 5 year scheme. The impact on frontline services will include:
 - 1.4.1 Additional costs associated with advertising
 - 1.4.2 Work associated with assessing and selecting suitable properties
 - 1.4.3 Setting up costs (see: “Cost Implications” below)
 - 1.4.4 Rent Recovery

1.4.5 Property monitoring

1.4.6 Void management

1.4.7 Impact on front line services:

- a) Homeless applicants having to wait longer for an Officer to deal with their enquiry
- b) Potential delays with regard to the processing of homeless applications
- c) Leaving families in bed and breakfast longer periods
- d) Increased temporary accommodation expenditure
- e) Delays in allocating properties in the Council's own stock and the potential increase in void turnaround times
- f) Delays in relation to the processing of housing waiting list applications

1.5 The additional workload may lead to a requirement for additional staffing to maintain existing service levels.

2.0 Cost Implications

2.1.1 On 15th November 2016, a discussion was held detailing some of the costs associated with the SVPRS. These points included:

- a) Each Syrian refugee family will come with a specific amount of funding which was intended to cover costs in relation to education, health and translation
- b) Each property used as part of the scheme will need to be inspected in terms of health and safety and will need electrical and gas certificates.
- c) Legal documentation for each property may be required for anything from 12 months to 5 years.
- d) A need for furniture
- e) Based on the costings of other local authorities, the cost to the Council was estimated to be in excess of £5,500 in Officer-time, based on looking after one family for a year.
- f) At the end of the 5 year period, the property will require redecoration to return it to the condition it was in at the start of the arrangement.
- g) Possible void costs

2.2 The Refugee Lead Officer from Devon County Council provided the Group with information on the following:

2.2.1 Funding for the scheme from the Home Office

2.2.2 Assistance available to the local authority from the SVPRS

2.2.3 Progress of the first arrival of refugees

2.2.4 Number of properties currently in the pipeline

2.2.5 Sourcing properties

2.2.6 Reasonable costings for setting up properties

2.2.7 DWP and Home Office background information

3.0 Conclusion

- 3.1 The working group resolved that the Cabinet should recommend that the Council seeks to house up to five refugee families for the duration of the scheme, providing the costs are met by the DCC-led resettlement programme.
- 3.2 The DCC representative stated that further talks are in progress with the Home Office, DCC and other local authorities as to the associated costs. The next meeting is scheduled to take place on Tuesday, 10th January 2017.
- 3.3 Subject to approval by Cabinet, and successful housing and support provision being sourced, the indicative date to receive the first Syrian refugee families would be March/April 2017.
- 3.4 It is to be noted that no firm costings are available and that any sums included above are minimum estimated figures.

Contact for more Information: Mike Parker, 01884 234906
mparker@middevon.gov.uk

Circulation of the Report: Councillor Ray Stanley

List of Background Papers:

- [MINUTES of a MEETING of the HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP held on 15 November 2016 at 2.15 pm](#)
- **MINUTES of a MEETING of the REFUGEE WORKING GROUP** held on 22 November 2016 at 2.00 pm (hyperlink)
- Syrian Refugee Resettlement Guide: (68 Pages)
http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/7632544/1.11_resettlement_guide_08.pdf/cc6c7b51-23a8-4621-b95c-a30bc3da438e