

CABINET

**Syrian Refugee Resettlement Programme
16 February 2016**

Report of Chief Officer (Health and Housing)

PURPOSE OF REPORT			
To advise Cabinet on the latest funding update in relation to resettlement of Syrian refugees and to seek a policy position on the council's participation in the resettlement programme.			
Key Decision	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Non-Key Decision	Referral from Cabinet Member
Date of notice of forthcoming key decision	21 January 2016		
This report is public.			

RECOMMENDATIONS OF COUNCILLOR KAREN LEYTHAM

- (1) That the contents of the letter (Appendix 1) from the Minister, Richard Harrington MP, are noted.
- (2) That Cabinet decides whether it wishes to participate in the Syrian refugee resettlement programme on the basis of the Government's funding position.
- (3) That, subject to recommendation 2, Cabinet decides whether all accommodation options should be explored and potentially used to house refugees including the council's own housing stock, other social rented stock and private sector properties.
- (4) That, subject to recommendation 3, Cabinet decides whether it wishes to take refugees from year 1 or delay this to year 2 and beyond.
- (5) That, subject to recommendations 2 and 3 above, the implementation of the programme be delegated to the Chief Officer (Health and Housing) in accordance with financial regulations.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 At its meeting on 23 September 2015, Council resolved to support the refugee resettlement programme in principle and called for further information from Government on how the programme would be funded and administered and how many refugees the district might be required to accommodate.

2.0 Proposal Details

- 2.1 Since September, the Government has been working closely with those local authorities that already participate in resettlement programmes and currently Lancashire authorities do not.
- 2.2 On 26 November 2015, we received a letter from the Minister detailing the funding that has been made available through the Spending Review process (Appendix 1). This confirms that full funding is available for the first year and additional funding available for years two to five on a tariff basis tapering from £5K per head to £1K per head over the four years. This amount is based on experience so far from those authorities already participating and Government expects that this amount will cover most costs. In addition, there will be some additional funding for the most vulnerable persons. We are aware that regular discussions are taking place between the Home Office and the Regional Strategic Migration Partnerships (SMP's) regarding the detail of the funding package.
- 2.3 Although most of the costs are expected to be covered, there is no cast iron guarantee that the full costs will be met. Whilst this exposes the council to some risk in terms of funding, officers are of the opinion that the majority of the costs required to support resettlement will fall to county council or health services such as education, English language support, support into employment, social care, medical care costs etc. The city council's costs are likely to be around housing and some liaison between other statutory and voluntary support although Lancashire County Council have now agreed to coordinate a Lancashire response across all districts so this reduces the burden on the city council. In terms of funding strain on the city council, it is difficult to be precise, but the bulk of housing related costs and benefits would generally be met through grant funding such as that provided to cover housing benefit awards, as an example, and our liaison costs be will met within existing officer resources within the housing team.
- 2.4 In terms of accommodation options, it has previously been suggested that placements in council housing stock would not be viable due to the limited stock we have and the already long waiting list for council accommodation. In addition Members will be aware that recent central Government housing policy means that our housing stock will continue to reduce over the next few years, leading to added strain in keeping up with demand for social housing.
- 2.5 Subject to each council agreeing to participate in the resettlement programme, Lancashire authorities are minded to collectively work up an offer to the Home Office which would mean Lancashire would take up to 500 refugees over 5 years which equates to approximately 150 properties which means 2 per authority per year on average.
- 2.6 To ensure the greatest opportunity to secure suitable accommodation, it would seem appropriate to have a range of housing options available from private sector stock, Registered Social Landlord stock and our own council housing stock. Acquiring suitable accommodation could present some challenges for us as we have information from Serco (who are administering the asylum seeker resettlement programme) that they are experiencing difficulty in acquiring private sector housing stock in suitable areas. We also

know that we have a limited availability of social rented properties in our district and we have a housing register of around 2000 applicants for our council housing stock. Giving priority to house refugees in council housing would therefore mean that a local citizen may have to wait longer to be rehoused.

- 2.7 Given this shortage of accommodation options and the fact that we have had several properties impacted by the floods in December, which is putting additional strain on the private rental market, Members may wish to participate in the resettlement scheme but delay accepting refugees until year 2 onwards, i.e., from April 2017.
- 2.8 The Home Office have clearly stated that they would like to work with authorities on a regional or sub regional basis rather than individual authorities. The North West Regional Strategic Migration Partnership is funded by the Home Office, and hosted by Manchester City Council. They work closely with the Home Office and DCLG and are tasked with leading on and coordinating any resettlement proposals within the North West.
- 2.9 The RSMP is arranging further discussions and meetings with local authorities over the next few weeks with a view to scoping a potential resettlement offer within Lancashire.
- 2.10 Members will already be aware that in addition to any refugee programme, the council is already participating in the asylum seeker dispersal programme and have received the first asylum seekers into the district. Whilst this programme is completely separate to the refugee resettlement programme, any support currently in place and being put in place for asylum seekers particularly from the voluntary sector, should be available to support any refugees as well.

3.0 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

- 3.1 The options for Cabinet are to either:
 1. Agree to participate in the Syrian refugee resettlement programme from year 1 onwards.
 2. Agree to participate in the Syrian refugee resettlement programme, but not until year 2 at the earliest.
 3. Not to participate in the Syrian refugee resettlement programme at all.
- 3.2 The issues and risks for each option are covered in the body of the report.

4.0 Officer Preferred Option (and comments)

- 4.1 Option 2 is the officer preferred option taking into account the comments in paragraphs 2.5 and 2.6

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 The views of Cabinet are sought in order for officers to progress any further discussions with RSMP regarding resettlement of refugees in this district.

RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK

This links to the corporate priority of health & wellbeing, particularly to the council's housing functions.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Health & Safety, Equality & Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, HR, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

Participation in the refugee resettlement programme could potentially have impacts on Human Rights, Community Safety and Equality and Diversity both for any refugees and citizens in our communities. The effective coordination of the programme and any support put in place will help mitigate any impacts.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

If the Council wishes to use its own housing stock to accommodate refugees, it will have to consider how (if at all) this can be achieved in accordance with its statutory obligations under the Housing Act 1996 and with reference to its own housing allocation policy.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

As set out in the body of the report, it is not possible to properly quantify at this stage whether there will be any additional call on the council's resources. It is re-iterated however, that it is expected that the majority of costs will be covered and so any potential residual costs should be manageable from within the council's overall budgets. The position will need to be kept under review, however, with any significant variances / issues being reported through to Members via existing corporate monitoring systems and the annual budget process, etc.

OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Human Resources:

Any officer capacity required is expected to be contained within existing staffing resources.

Information Services:

None

Property:

There could be implications for council housing stock but these can be managed.

Open Spaces:

None

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The S151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

none

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