

SUBJECT: VULNERABLE PERSONS RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMME

DIRECTORATE: HOUSING AND INVESTMENT

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PARTNERSHIPS MANAGER**

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This paper will update Executive on the current position and requirements relating to the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme, sets out the considerations and implications of the scheme and requests permission to join the scheme.

2. Background

- 2.1 In Autumn 2015 the Government pledged to accept 20,000 Syrian Refugees into the country from the official refugee camps in Syria, by 2020.
- 2.2 The Strategic Migration Partnership in the East Midlands is led by East Midlands Councils. There is no obligation on any local authority to take refugees and there is no intention by government to make participation in the scheme compulsory.
- 2.3 So far 14,000 refugees have arrived in the UK, 607 of these have been accepted into the East Midlands. Until very recently, no refugees had been accepted into Lincolnshire, however in early November 2018, two families arrived and have been rehoused in North Kesteven and South Kesteven.
- 2.4 The refugees usually arrive on specially commissioned charter flights. The next flight is due in March 2019. Beyond that, there are further flights scheduled in June, September and November. East Midlands Councils is seeking pledges for 75-80 families across the Region for the March intake, and has requested that Lincolnshire considers accepting additional families into the county. North and South Kesteven have pledged to take further families and South Holland has agreed to take a family. It is proposed that Lincoln pledges to take 3-5 families during 2019.
- 2.5 A Lincolnshire Resettlement Group has been formed, which is attended by the district councils, the County Council and other relevant agencies and organisations. The group is chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive at North Kesteven District Council. It is intended that this group will continue to work together to share resources and good practice, to progress the intake of further refugees into the county.

3. Requirements of the Scheme

- 3.1 The Resettlement Scheme sets out a number of requirements which must be met by receiving authorities:

3.2 Arrival

- Meet/greet and collection from airport in unmarked vehicles with appropriate safety equipment (child seats), escort to accommodation and brief on use of amenities.

Accommodation

- should meet Housing Health and Safety Rating System standards and should be affordable and sustainable.
- should have any adaptations required to meet disability requirements completed prior to arrival.
- should be furnished appropriately (food storage, cooking and washing facilities) but with no luxury items (TV, DVD, electrical entertainment).
- registered with utilities and arrangement for payments in place (no pre-payment accounts).
- a briefing on accommodation should be provided together with health and safety and emergency contact.
- welcome pack of groceries.

Support (office, drop-ins, outreach, home visits)

- specialist case/support worker(s).
- interpreting services.
- cash allowance for each person of £200 (to last until welfare benefits are in place).
- advice and assistance to register for mainstream benefits and services.
- registration and collection of Biometric Residence Permits.
- registering with schools – if places are not available locally will need to assist with transport. May need specialist education places (education fees are funded separately).
- English language and literacy classes in place (within 1 month and for 12 months), together with appropriate child care to allow parents to attend.
- attendance at Job Centre Plus.
- registering with GP and dentist.
- referral to mental health and other specialist services as required.
- assistance with access to employment.
- support plan for each family or individual for 12 months (and possibly beyond dependent on circumstances) with 2 week, 3, 6, 9 and 12 month reviews.

Health Care

- GP, dentist and other specialist health services (funded separately).

General requirements

- support generally provided during office hours but some out of hours provision required.
- procedures required – complaints, managing and reporting critical incidents.
- staffing – appropriate recruitment, training, experience, security (DBS), staffing levels.
- information sharing protocols.

4. Funding

4.1 Funding is set on a 'per person' tariff basis for direct local authority costs

- Year 1 - £8,520
- Year 2 - £5,000
- Year 3 - £3,700
- Year 4 - £2,300
- Year 5 - 1,000

Additional support is available for education and medical needs.

The refugees are able to access welfare benefit payments and other public services. On arrival in the UK, refugees are issued with a 5 year Humanitarian Protection Visa and are able to work immediately.

The grant is not ring fenced and can be used by local authorities to provide support to refugees as required, eg, support for integration, English language training, social care, etc. The funds can be pooled and managed across all areas and all refugees.

It is possible to apply for additional funding through an 'extreme cases' fund, which will cover additional social care costs for those with complex needs.

5. Areas for Consideration

- 5.1 In 2016 Lincolnshire County Council advised it was unable to support the scheme due to concerns relating to the availability of resources. In 2018 the County Council agreed to offer support to the scheme but with caution particularly in relation to availability of school places across the county. Following a recent change of leadership, the County Council has advised that it is unable to offer further support for the scheme at present. A review of the outcomes regarding the current families accepted into the area will be undertaken, and consideration will be given to the likely future availability of resources before any further commitment is made.
- 5.2 The County Homelessness Partnerships Manager has attended several information sharing events and conferences, which have been run to encourage local authorities to join the scheme. She has also visited Broxtowe Borough Council which is part of a consortium of Nottinghamshire authorities working together to resettle refugees to obtain an 'on the ground' view of the scheme.
- 5.3 Other areas report that despite not publicising the imminent arrival of the first tranche of refugees, there was significant press interest which was largely negative and led to some local community unrest in some cases. If it is decided to proceed, caution will need to be applied to any press/publicity however there have been no issues with the recent arrival of refugees into North and South Kesteven.
- 5.4 Any support services are likely to be highly intensive for the first 2-3 months and then will reduce to regular but less intense contact so it is unlikely to be cost effective to employ our own staff. However it will not be sufficient to engage generic support workers, they will need to be skilled and experienced in working with refugees. North and South Kesteven have engaged the services of a

specialist support provision organisation who, subject to meeting the appropriate procurement requirements, could also be engaged in the city.

- 5.5 Careful consideration will need to be given to the implications of use of social housing and the reaction from those already on the Housing Register given the shortage of affordable housing in the area. However, using privately rented accommodation could also prove challenging as there are few local landlords who are willing to work in partnership with the council and the low levels of Local Housing Allowance can mean there is a significant rent top-up for those on Housing Benefit, this is likely to be unaffordable for the refugees.
- 5.6 The location of accommodation will also need to be carefully considered due to access to services and facilities. As well as the obvious things such as schools, GP, bus routes, we will also need to consider where Halal meat can be purchased, etc, and likely community acceptance.
- 5.7 English classes are compulsory for the refugees so we will either have to transport them to established classes (eg, in Nottingham) or will need to set up specialist classes in Lincoln. Separate classes will be required for the men and women as culturally it is unlikely they will be willing to attend together. Child care will need to be provided while the women attend classes as culturally the men will not care for the children.

6. Strategic Priorities

6.1 Let's reduce inequality

Accepting Refugees into the city will demonstrate the Council's commitment to assisting vulnerable people and helping them integrate into the local community.

7. Organisational Impacts

7.1 Finance

The funding attached to the project is set out in paragraph 4.1 above. There is no guarantee this funding will cover the entire cost of the placement, however it is considered to be 'gold standard' in terms of government funding. However any additional costs will be met from existing budgets.

7.2 Legal Implications including Procurement Rules

There is no requirement to enter into this scheme, it is entirely voluntary on the part of the council.

7.3 Equality, Diversity and Human Rights

The Public Sector Equality Duty means that the Council must consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work, in shaping policy, delivering services and in relation to their own employees.

It requires that public bodies have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities

8. Risk Implications

8.1 (i) Options Explored

The council has two options, either to accept the refugees into the city or not.

8.2 (ii) Key risks associated with the preferred approach

There is a reputational risk associated with both courses of action. This will be managed by a careful and restricted publicity strategy.

There is a risk the funding will not cover all of the requirements of the programme, however this programme does receive 'gold standard' funding from government.

9. Recommendation

9.1 Given the considerations set out above, when set against the moral and ethical desire to assist with the scheme, it is recommended that;

- The Council expresses its willingness and eagerness to join the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme and, subject to confirmed support from Lincolnshire County Council, agrees to accept 3-5 families over the course of the next year.
- The Council commits the staffing and financial resources to join the scheme and continues to work in partnership with the other Lincolnshire authorities and relevant agencies to deliver the scheme.

Is this a key decision? No

Do the exempt information categories apply? No

Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (call-in and urgency) apply? No

How many appendices does the report contain? None

List of Background Papers: None

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