

REPORT TO: POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 14 SEPTEMBER 2015

REPORT ON: SYRIAN VULNERABLE PERSONS RELOCATION SCHEME

REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

REPORT NO: 347-2015

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To seek the Committee's approval for Dundee City Council to express an interest in participating in the UK Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) Scheme.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the Committee:-

- a) Approves the contents of the report.
- b) Agrees the establishment of a project team and reporting arrangements to coordinate Dundee City Council's involvement in the Scheme.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 UK Government will cover the following costs under the VPR Scheme:

- Reception and general travel costs to the receiving area.
- Actual costs of up to 2 months void costs when securing accommodation, plus the actual cost of adapting and furnishing properties where necessary.
- One off cash and clothing allowance for new arrivals of £200 per person paid in advance of mainstream benefits.
- £4,500 per head for education costs for 5-18 year olds (£2,850 for ages 3-5) plus any first year costs for specialist educational support which may be required.
- Costs of providing 1 year's orientation support including provision of English for Speakers of other languages (ESOL) provision.

3.2 It will not cover:-

- First year adult and child social care costs.
- Primary care costs plus first year secondary health costs including any specialist services.
- Future year support costs.

These costs are expected to be met by the relevant local authority and health board.

The Scottish Government has signalled a willingness to look at options for assistance if future year support costs were to prove significant in any individual case, and beyond what a local authority is able to meet.

The Councils net financial contribution will be assessed by the project team and reported back to members.

4 BACKGROUND

4.1 Recent events have highlighted the plight of refugees fleeing Syria. As at March 2015 the UN estimated over 12 million people to be in need of humanitarian assistance within Syria. An estimated 3.9 million people had fled the country and 7.6 million had been displaced within it.

- 4.2 The UK Government established the intention to relocate some of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees to the UK under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) Scheme in January 2014.

A number of Scottish local authorities have received Council approval to explore the possibility of becoming involved and are in discussions with the Home Office at present.

- 4.3 The VPR Scheme is based on need (as opposed to a quota). Individuals identified by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are allowed to bring immediate family with them, limited to one spouse/partner (who must be over 18) and their minor dependent children (under 18+ not living an independent life). Families generally compose four to six people inclusive of the applicant. The Scheme prioritises help for survivors of torture and violence, women and children at risk and those in need of medical care. The Home Office works with the UNHCR to identify suitable applicants.

All applicants and accompanying family members are subject to the usual immigration checks and screening prior to a visa being granted. Those with a criminal past or links to war crimes or extremism are excluded from the scheme. Successful applicants are granted leave to remain for 5 years with full access to employment and public funds and rights to family reunion comparable to refugees.

If they have not been able to return to Syria within the 5 years allowed for by the scheme, they may be eligible to apply for settlement in the UK.

Applicants are subject to health screening and there is a process in place for reviewing cases with specific medical needs. Following this assessment and consideration of broader needs, local authorities can confirm to the Home Office whether or not they are able to accept specific applicants.

- 4.4 It is proposed that Dundee City Council expresses an interest in participating in the VPR Scheme. At this stage it is not possible to determine the number of families that may be relocated to Dundee.

Subject to approval and initial discussions with the Home Office it is anticipated that key participants in any project team would include Neighbourhood Services (particularly Housing and Communities), Children and Families Services, Health and Social Care Partnership, NHS Tayside, Police Scotland and the voluntary sector.

It is also proposed that wider social support through communities and faith groups would be beneficial should Dundee's offer of involvement in the Scheme be accepted.

Detail on likely numbers and therefore a fuller financial consideration would not be known until Dundee's participation had been confirmed by the Home Office and suitable refugees had been identified with final numbers and configuration of family groups known.

At present Home Office assumes a minimum notice period of 4 weeks therefore, if an expression of interest was accepted by the Home Office, arrangements may need to be made at relatively short notice.

Events have moved quickly over the last week and may continue to do so as the UK response to the humanitarian crisis in Syria unfolds. It is, therefore, proposed that officers maintain a watching brief on developments around the VPS Scheme and any other relevant or associated refugee relief and relocation schemes which exist or may be developed and report back to the Elected Members as required.

5 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This Report has been screened for any policy implications in respect of Sustainability, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Anti-Poverty, Equality Impact Assessment and Risk Management.

There are no major issues.

6 CONSULTATIONS

- 6.1 The Chief Executive, the Executive Director of Corporate Services, Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services, Executive Director of Children and Families Services, Chief Officer Dundee Health and Social Care Partnership, Head of Democratic and Legal Services and Police Scotland have been consulted and are in agreement with the contents of this report.

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 None.

David Martin
Chief Executive

10 September 2015

