

**EXECUTIVE BOARD**  
**28<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2015**

**Syrian Vulnerable Person's Relocation Scheme**

**RECOMMENDATIONS / KEY DECISIONS REQUIRED:**

**It is recommended that, with immediate effect, we will:**

- 1. Appoint a member 'champion' and lead officer to be responsible for developing the Council's approach**
- 2. Initiate a cross sector task force of interested partners to deliver a co-ordinated programme**
- 3. Work with neighbouring authorities, public sector colleagues and the third sector (including advice agencies, voluntary, charitable and religious organisations) to ensure a co-ordinated and effective regional approach**
- 4. Play a full part in national conversations and initiatives, working closely with Welsh Government and the WLGA**
- 5. Prepare a detailed action programme for consideration by the Executive Board, including the financial implications**
- 6. Regularly report back to Executive Board on progress regarding the delivery of the re-settlement and support programme**

**REASONS:**

**On the 9<sup>th</sup> September, 2015 County Council recognised the plight of Syrian refugees and made clear its wish to participate in the international humanitarian relief effort.**

**Scrutiny Committee recommendations / comments: N/A**

|                              |     |
|------------------------------|-----|
| Exec Board Decision Required | YES |
| Council Decision Required    | NO  |

**Executive Board Member Portfolio Holder:** Cllr. E Dole - Leader

**Directorate**

**Name of Head of Service:**  
Robin Staines

**Designations:**

**Head of Housing and Public Protection**

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
**EXECUTIVE BOARD**  
**28<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2015**

**Syrian Vulnerable Person's Relocation Scheme**

**1. Background and context**

The purpose of this report is to inform Members about the Syrian Vulnerable Person's Relocation Scheme (SPVR scheme) with a view to Carmarthenshire considering how we can support, and actively participate, in the Scheme.

County Council agreed on 9th September that the desperate situation faced by the refugees fleeing the war in Syria was tantamount to a humanitarian disaster and the Council would play a part, and meet its moral obligations, in delivering relief to those affected.

More than 300,000 people have crossed the Mediterranean to Europe so far this year. These people came from different countries under different circumstances. Some are economic migrants while many are refugees fleeing conflict. There has been a vast increase in the numbers arriving across the Eastern Mediterranean from Turkey – more than 150,000 people have attempted that route since January. The majority of these are Syrian refugees where more than 11 million people driven from their homes.

The Prime Minister announced the UK Government's approach to Parliament on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> September 2015. The key points of the announcement are that the UK will:

- Resettle up to 20,000 Syrian refugees over the rest of this Parliament.
- Not take part in the European Union's relocation initiative and will decide its own approach.
- Continue to re-settle refugees from the camps and from elsewhere in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. The belief is that it provides refugees with a more direct and safe route to the UK, rather than risking the hazardous journey to Europe which has tragically cost so many lives.
- Continue to use the established UNHCR process for identifying and resettling refugees and grant a 5 year humanitarian protection visa when they arrive.
- Significantly expand the criteria for the existing Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation scheme.
- On the advice of the UNHCR, prioritise vulnerable children (including orphans) when their needs are best met by relocation.
- Meet the full cost of supporting Syrian refugees in the UK through aid spending (for the first year).

Setting out the Welsh Government's position, the First Minister has written: "Wales has a long history of providing refuge to people feeling persecution and refugees from many countries have been welcomed by people in Wales over the years. We are very willing to play our part in supporting the implementation of the Vulnerable Person Relocation Scheme." The First Minister also noted the importance of planning for arrivals and appropriate resourcing of specialist services and support that would be required.

Local authorities have also recently received correspondence from a coalition of third sector and faith based organisations on the SVPR Scheme, seeking their will and commitment to participate and provide sanctuary to those eligible and asking for feedback on any plans to proceed.

A multi agency, multi sector summit is being planned by the Welsh Government to be held on Thursday 17th 2015 to plan Wales' contribution to the scheme. This is very much based on voluntary participation rather than a compulsory quota.

Local authorities who participate in the Scheme are being asked to identify how many individuals or families could be accommodated and over what period. There is no minimum number. A process for referrals would be agreed with the assumption that local authorities will be given a minimum of 4 weeks notice of new arrivals and longer for any complex care needs.

The SPVR scheme has been in operation for some time. A number of authorities in England and Scotland are participating and have already received individuals under the Scheme (187 people at the end of March 2015). Generally these have been families, but with some couples and single people too. As by way of example, Coventry has received 57 Syrian people so far under the Scheme (and are expecting more) and in general it has operated smoothly, with no major difficulties. Specific health care and specialist needs are identified in advance to aid planning and support for involvement in the Scheme was sought from key partners. Integration support in the main is delivered through a commission of third sector bodies (CAB, Law Centre, Migrant Centre). Many of the new arrivals are very resilient people and have also supported themselves through this transition. Other local contacts, for example, Syrian people studying in local Universities have also been involved for additional help and support. The authority has taken a low- key approach to their participation in the Scheme to aid a smooth settlement process for those who have arrived.

## 2. Implications for Carmarthenshire.

By taking part in the scheme, we would have to commit to providing or sourcing appropriate accommodation for the households. This could range from single people to families. We would also have to make provision in a number of other areas such as social care and education. There is also the need for a co-ordinating role in terms of the economic, health and general well being of the refugees. The full participation of other public, and independent sector, partners will be critical to deliver an appropriate, caring and proportionate response.

The UK Government's commitment stands at 20,000 people over the life of the next Parliament (until 2020). If we assumed households comprised 2.5 people, this would entail the resettlement in the UK of 8,000 households. If our offer was based pro rata on our population, Carmarthenshire would offer to re-settle 60 people or 24 households (based on Carmarthenshire being 0.3% of the UK total population). This level could be relatively easily accommodated within the social housing sector. However health, education and social care needs could only be assessed on an individual basis and it is therefore difficult to estimate the immediate demand for these services.

From a refugee's perspective, Carmarthenshire may not have the infrastructure to sustainably support resettlement. There is no existing discernible Syrian population in the county at present and no community resilience infrastructure. There is a deficit of developed community services, including translation, advice, general welfare and spiritual/religious places of worship. This is amplified by a lack of specialist services reflecting the needs of refugees leaving a war zone. This may make Carmarthenshire less appealing. Depending on dispersal, 24 households may not provide the safety, security and sanctuary that refugees may need after the trauma they have experienced.

It is, therefore, worth considering a number greater than 24 households to ensure a resilient and thriving community could be enabled. Between ourselves and our housing association partners, we make approximately 1,100 new lettings a year. We have already contacted local housing associations to gain their views regarding participation. This number does not include our social lettings agency and our relationship with private landlords which could also be called upon. Of the lettings, in the region of 500 are made to homeless households.

The Council could set aside a number of the remainder for the resettlement programme. Careful consideration would have to be given in terms of the type, size and locality of the individual properties required and their proximity to each other and local services (such as health and education which would reflect individual households). Fifteen properties per year for the duration of the scheme would be both reasonable and sustainable. This would deliver homes for 60 households as opposed to 60 persons on the basis of the pro rata to population. This would also provide a basis for a more sustainable, safe and self supporting community. Planning would need to be instigated in terms of the co-ordination of other public services and the support voluntary, charitable and religious organisations can offer.

## Recommendations

In order to respond quickly and efficiently to the situation it is recommended to:

1. Appoint a member 'champion' and lead officer to be responsible for developing the Council's approach.
2. Initiate a cross sector task force of interested partners to deliver a co-ordinated programme. This will include education, social care and housing colleagues in the council together with the NHS and other interested parties.
3. Work with neighbouring authorities, public sector colleagues and the third sector partners (including advice agencies, charitable organisations and religious interests) to ensure a co-ordinated and effective local and regional approach.
4. Play a full part in national conversations and initiatives, working closely with Welsh Government and the WLGA.
5. Prepare a detailed action programme, including confirmation of potential re-settlement figures and the resulting financial and other implications for existing services, for consideration by the Executive Board.
6. Regularly report back to the Executive Board on progress regarding the delivery of the re-settlement and support programme.

## Appendix 1: Overview of the Syrian Vulnerable Person's Relocation Scheme

1. The SVPR Scheme will run in parallel with the UNCHR's Syria Humanitarian Admission Programme (HAP) and is based on need. In particular, the Scheme will prioritise help for survivors of torture and violence, and women and children at risk or in need of medical care. For planning purposes, the UK is working on the basis that the UK would take around 20,000 people over the next four. The expectation is that the caseload will include families (with both parents) and women and children at risk cases (i.e. single parent families, female headed).
2. Those eligible for the Scheme are allowed to bring their immediate family with them, limited to one spouse/partner (who must be over 18) and their minor dependent children (under 18). Generally, families will comprise of 4-6 people.
3. All applicants will be 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). Those accepted under the Scheme will be granted humanitarian protections giving them leave to remain for 5 years with full access to employment and public funds (including benefits) and rights to family reunion comparable to refugees. If at the end of 5 years they are not able to return to Syria, they may be eligible to apply for settlement in the UK. Usual immigration rules apply in terms of criminal offences, being a danger to the public, or to national security.
4. Local authorities who choose to participate in the Scheme take the lead in working with other key local partners to ensure that arrivals are provided with suitable accommodation and the specific needs of these vulnerable individuals are met. This includes securing the prior sign up of local partners: health (primary and secondary healthcare providers); education and housing providers. Some may wish to commission support services from the third sector (e.g. to deliver orientation services). Consideration will also need to be given to specialist support providers subject to the individuals' specific requirements.
5. The UK Government will meet the costs of the arrivals in terms of accommodation and integration support and education for the first year of arrival. Staffing costs to cover administration of the scheme will also be considered. The funding provided will be based on actual spend by local authorities, for example, the payment of education costs will be on a unit cost basis (which would include language support). A one off cash and clothing allowance for new arrivals of £200 per person is also provided. The amount provided to support orientation and integration support is not known will some funding for these activities would be provided.
6. It is unclear at the moment whether and how health costs will be covered in Wales. The Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty will write to the Health and Social Care Minister seeking clarification on whether the Welsh Government will reimburse health costs for the same timescale and inform the WLGA.

DETAILED REPORT ATTACHED ?

NO

# IMPLICATIONS

I confirm that other than those implications which have been agreed with the appropriate Directors / Heads of Service and are referred to in detail below, there are no other implications associated with this report :

Signed: Robin Staines

Head of Housing & Public Protection

|   |       |         |     |                        |                       |                 |
|---|-------|---------|-----|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities | Legal | Finance | ICT | Risk Management Issues | Staffing Implications | Physical Assets |
| YES                                     | YES   | YES     | NO  | NO                     | YES                   | NO              |

## 1. Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities

It will be critical to understand the wishes of the refugees to support a resilient community and ensure community cohesion with the existing community. Examples elsewhere suggest that communities have been welcoming of the refugees given their experience and plight.

## 2. Legal

Consideration would need to be given to amend the Housing allocations policy. This could be achieved quickly potentially through the development of a local lettings policy. Consideration could also be given to using alternative legislation to make the allocation and letting in social housing.

## 3. Finance

Financial implications will be considered through the development of the project and on clarification from both the UK and Welsh Governments.

## 4. ICT

None

## 5. Risk Management Issues

None

## 6. Physical Assets

Use of council housing stock.

## 7.Staffing Implications

None

## CONSULTATIONS

I confirm that the appropriate consultations have taken in place and the outcomes are as detailed below

Signed: Robin Staines Head of Housing and Public Protection

### 1. Scrutiny Committee

None

### 2.Local Member(s)

None

### 3.Community / Town Council

None

### 4.Relevant Partners

None

### 5.Staff Side Representatives and other Organisations

None

Section 100D Local Government Act, 1972 – Access to Information  
List of Background Papers ed in the preparation of this report:

THERE ARE NONE

| Title of Document | File Ref No. | Locations that the papers are available for public inspection |
|-------------------|--------------|---|
| None              |              |   |