

**COUNCIL:**

**24 SEPTEMBER 2015**

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**CABINET PROPOSAL**

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**SCHEME TO SUPPORT THE RESETTLEMENT OF SYRIAN AND AFGHAN INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES IN THE UK**

**Reason for this Report**

1. To provide Council with details of the Home Office's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme and to recommend that Cardiff Council agrees in principle to enter into the scheme.
2. To provide Council with details of the Home Office scheme for the resettlement of Afghan nationals who have supported the British Armed Forces in the Afghanistan conflict and to recommend that Cardiff Council agrees in principle to enter into the scheme.
3. To note that a multi agency leadership group has been established to oversee the preparations for regional participation in the scheme comprising Members and Officers of the City of Cardiff Council , the Vale of Glamorgan Council, Cardiff University Health Board and Third Sector and Faith group representatives.
4. To grant delegated authority to the Director of Communities, Housing and Customer Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Health, Housing and Wellbeing to progress the detail of the Authorities involvement in the scheme.
5. That this report is referred for information to Council on 24<sup>th</sup> September to seek full Council support for the implementation of the scheme.

**Background**

Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) Scheme

6. The United Nations estimated that as of February 2015 12.2 million people are in need of humanitarian aid within Syria. At least 7.6 million people in Syria have been forced to flee their homes and there are some 3.8 million refugees in neighbouring countries. (Home Office 2015)
7. On 29 January 2014, the Home Secretary made a statement to Parliament outlining the Government's intention to relocate to the UK

some of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees, displaced to neighbouring countries by the on-going conflict. The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) Scheme runs in parallel with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) Syria Humanitarian Admission Programme (HAP). It 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 UNCHR to identify those at risk.

8. The scheme is separate to the arrangements in place for those seeking asylum in the UK. Cardiff is the initial accommodation centre for Wales and the South West region (one of seven initial accommodation centres in the UK.) Cardiff is also an official dispersal area for asylum seekers and has a long established history of welcoming both asylum seekers and refugees to the city with well developed support mechanisms in place.
9. The first group of Syrians arrived as part of the programme in March 2014 and, by the end of December 2014 (the last published figures), 143 Syrians were relocated to the UK – 34 of which were heads of family and 109 their dependents. It was the Home Office's intention to continue to relocate 10-15 people per month over a 4/5 year period.
10. Individuals identified by UNHCR are allowed to bring their immediate family with them. This is limited to one spouse / partner (who must be over 18) and their minor dependent children (under 18 and not living an independent life). There is no provision to allow applicants to bring over-age dependant relatives unless they also meet the vulnerability criteria in their own right or the Home Office is satisfied that there is an existing dependency.
11. Generally, families will comprise of between 4-6 people (inclusive of the head of family) but cases will also consist of single people and the occasional larger family. Medical reports are produced by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in advance of arrival.
12. Those who are accepted under the VPR Scheme are granted humanitarian protection giving them leave to remain for 5 years with full access to employment and public funds and rights to family reunion comparable to refugees. At the end of the 5 years, if they have not been able to return to Syria, they may be eligible to apply for settlement in the UK.
13. Settlement may be refused if the person is convicted of a criminal offence during their leave and will be refused if they pose a danger to the public, or to national security. Leave to remain can also be curtailed if such evidence comes to light during the initial 5 year period. Settlement can be revoked if evidence emerges after it has been granted.
14. 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.

15. Central Government will meet the costs of the arrivals in terms of orientation support, health and education costs for the first year from arrival. Staffing costs to cover administration of the scheme will also be met.
16. Central government funding will cover a range of measures to assist the support and orientation of this group. The list below provides an indication of the kind of funding that is envisaged will be provided:
  - Reception and ground travel costs to the receiving area.
  - The actual costs of up to two 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 receipt of mainstream benefits.
  - £600 per head for primary care costs plus first year secondary health care costs including any specialist services that are necessary.
  - £4,500 per head for education costs for 5-18 year olds (£2,250 for ages 3-5) plus any first year costs for specialist educational support which may be required.
  - Where necessary, first year adult and child social care costs as incurred.
  - Actual costs of providing one year's orientation support.
17. Particularly given the specific requirements of this group, this list is not definitive and is open to negotiation if local authorities consider there are other elements not covered here that would require funding in order to administer an orientation programme of this kind.

#### Resettlement Scheme for Afghan Individuals and Families

18. The National Security Council has agreed a package of measures to offer to locally engaged staff in Afghanistan who will be made redundant as a result of the UK's military drawdown. Locally engaged staff who were in Her Majesty's Government's employ on 19 December 2012 (the date the Prime Minister announced the UK's drawdown) and who have accrued 12 months service are eligible under the scheme. The offers made under this scheme are additional to the usual redundancy terms in local engaged staff employment contracts. The package has three elements:
  - Up to 5 years' paid training or education in Afghanistan, or
  - 18 months salary, paid in instalments, or
  - Relocation to the UK, but only for interpreters or equivalent grades in front line roles outside the wire in Helmand, with immediate family.

19. Local Authorities across the UK are being asked to participate in the programme when relocation is the chosen option.
20. Participating Authorities will work with the Home Office to ensure that what is available in the locality fits the needs of those that will be potentially relocated and will agree to approximate numbers that can be accommodated. Participating Authorities will be expected to provide newly arrived individuals or families with help to adjust to life in the UK including providing them and their immediate family members with:
  - i. Accommodation for four months;
  - ii. Financial assistance pending access to welfare benefits or the new arrival securing employment (whichever occurs first, but nevertheless limited to four months); and
  - iii. Integration support, including but not limited to providing employment advice and assistance accessing services and benefits.

## **Issues**

21. A recent commitment from the Prime Minister outlined the UK government's agreement to support and resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees through the VPR over the next five years. This will substantially increase the proposed number coming through the scheme and it is anticipated that around 400 people per month will arrive across the UK.
22. In England HM Treasury has made funding available for Local Health Boards to support Syrian families and individuals that may have complex health needs that resettle in the UK. Welsh Government has yet to confirm its position in relation to additional funding for Health services but has called a Summit on the Refugee situation on 17<sup>th</sup> September.
23. In July 2015 the Cardiff and the Vale Joint Local Service Board considered a report on the scheme and agreed in principle to co-ordinate capacity and resources to progress the scheme utilising existing statutory processes and voluntary support mechanisms. This has been taken forward with the development of a Multi Agency leadership group comprising and attended by Members and Officers from the City of Cardiff Council, the Vale of Glamorgan Council, the Cardiff University Health Board and Third Sector and Faith group representatives. The group is chaired by the Cabinet member for Health Housing and Wellbeing.
24. Initial discussions with the Multi Agency leadership group have focussed on the need for a regional approach to ensuring the successful implementation of the scheme and the need to build on existing mechanisms and provision. Experience of successful resettlement in the region over many years has made clear the need for very effective planning particularly in terms of accommodation, education, health and access to community support networks. The Group will be instrumental in ensuring effective planning for the scheme and will assist in scoping the

numbers of refugees that the region will resettle and the schedule of arrivals over the period to 2020.

### **Local Member consultation**

25. In view of the significant interest in this issue it is proposed that this report is referred to Council on 24<sup>th</sup> September for information and in order that all members are provided with an opportunity to debate the implementation of the scheme.

### **Reason for Recommendations**

26. To provide Council with the details of the Home Office Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme and the scheme for the resettlement of Afghan nationals and to propose that the City of Cardiff Council agrees to take part in both schemes.

### **Financial Implications**

27. This report does not quantify detailed financial implications of either the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme or the Resettlement Scheme for Afghan Individuals and Families but does detail some of the financial assistance to be made available by Central Government.
28. Detailed consideration will need to be given as to the required level of financial support in the event of scheme participation and any additional potential impact on Council services and budgets both in terms of the current financial monitoring position and the budget setting process for future years.
29. It will also be essential that any related costs are separately identified and that available funding is maximised in line with funding terms and conditions.

### **Legal Implications**

30. The Cabinet has the necessary legal and statutory powers to agree to join the Home Office Vulnerable Persons Scheme and delegate the detailed implementation of this to relevant officers. The most relevant are the Children Act 1989 and the National Assistance Act 1948. These provide powers to provide assistance including accommodation. In the case of children there may be legal obligations especially in relation to unaccompanied asylum seeking children. There are a number of exclusions for persons who are subject to immigration control and categorised as having no access to public funds.
31. Revised powers and duties will also arise with the enactment of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. The Act received Royal Assent in May 2014, however, the relevant parts are not scheduled to come into force until April 2016. These will repeal and replace the key duties on the council under various social services provisions, including the Children Act 1989. The duties that the new Act will place on local authorities in relation to asylum seeking children will be

broadly the same as the current duties under the Children Act. They are however framed in terms of a duty to promote “physical and mental health and emotional well-being”.

32. The Council meeting procedure Rules provide for the Leader and cabinet to bring Reports to full council for debate.

### **HR Implications**

33. It is unknown at this stage whether any additional capacity is required from an employee aspect and if it is, whether this would be required within the Council or with our partners. However if it were the case that additional capacity was required within the Council then there would be full Trade Union consultation and the agreed corporate processes would be followed.

### **CABINET CONSIDERATION**

34. The Cabinet considered this report on 17 September 2015 and resolved that:
  1. It be agreed in principle to enter into the Home Office’s Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme.
  2. It be agreed in principle to enter into the Home Office’s scheme for the resettlement of Afghan nationals that have supported the British Armed Forces in the Afghanistan conflict.
  3. It be noted that a multi agency leadership group has been established to oversee the preparations for regional participation in the scheme comprising Members and Officers of the City of Cardiff Council , the Vale of Glamorgan Council, Cardiff University Health Board and Third Sector and Faith group representatives.
  4. Authority be delegated to the Director of Communities, Housing and Customer Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Health, Housing and Wellbeing to progress the detail of the Authorities involvement in the scheme.

### **CABINET PROPOSAL**

Council is recommended to support the implementation of the scheme.

### **THE CABINET**

17 September 2015