

MAYOR AND CABINET			
Title	Resettlement of Refugee Households		
Key decision	Yes	Item no	
Wards	All		
Contributors	Executive Director for Customer Services and Executive Director for Resources and Regeneration		
Class	Part 1	22 March 2017	

1 Summary

- 1.1 The humanitarian crisis in Syria has resulted in around 5 million Syrians fleeing the country as a result of the internal conflict which began in 2011. The UK government pledged to resettle 20,000 of these Syrians in October 2015.
- 1.2 Lewisham's Mayor and Cabinet agreed to resettle 10 Syrian refugee households via the Home Office's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme (SVPR) on 7 September 2016.
- 1.3 The programme includes a funding offer to local authorities that contributes towards the costs of delivering support and other services to refugee households, and to this end Lewisham has commissioned the charity SHP to work with the families as the support providers. To date, two families have been resettled in Lewisham under the scheme.
- 1.4 In April 2016 the Government announced that as well as the 20,000 Syrian refugees, it would also accept 3,000 vulnerable and at risk children and their families under the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS).
- 1.5 Lewisham has been asked by the Home Office team coordinating the SVPR scheme to also consider resettling families under the Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme (VCRS). Under this scheme, local authorities are funded in the same way as the SVPR programme and the families are resettled from the same countries in the Middle East and Northern Africa region. However, unlike the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme, families resettled under VCRS may be of any nationality.
- 1.6 This report seeks approval to resettle families under the Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme as part of Lewisham's existing framework to resettle Syrian families under the SVPR programme.

2 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To seek Mayor and Cabinet approval for the resettlement of refugee households

under the Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) in the same proportion as the two Government announcements.

- 2.2 To provide an update on Lewisham's progress to resettle 10 families via the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme.
- 2.3 To seek Mayor and Cabinet approval for the potential resettlement of more than 10 refugee families in total, as funding and feasibility allows.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 The Mayor is recommended to:
- 3.2 Delegate responsibility to Executive Directors for Customer Services and Resources and Regeneration to enter into a formal agreement with the Home Office's Refugee Resettlement Unit to resettle refugee households referred from the Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) in Lewisham.
- 3.3 Delegate responsibility to Executive Directors for Customer Services and Resources and Regeneration to resettle these VCRS refugee households in the same proportion as the two Government announcements in respect of the SVPR programme and VCRS schemes. The Government has national targets to resettle 20000 individuals under SVPR and 3000 individuals under VCRS, therefore it is recommended that the Council resettle SVPR and VCRS families in this same proportion.
- 3.4 Delegate responsibility to Executive Directors for Customer Services and Resources and Regeneration to resettle potentially more than 10 refugee families in total, as funding and feasibility allows.

4 Policy Context

- 4.1 The actions recommended in this report will strengthen the council's corporate policy of developing opportunities for the active participation and engagement of people in the life of the community ('Community Leadership and Empowerment'). The arrival of families resettled under the SVPR has already inspired volunteerism and philanthropy in various community groups and individuals, and is expected that this will increase as Vulnerable Children and their families are resettled under VCRS.
- 4.2 The actions recommended in this report will also strengthen the council's aim, as laid out in Lewisham's Sustainable Community Strategy 2008-2020, to support citizens to be Empowered and responsible' with people are actively involved in their local area and contributing to supportive communities. Opportunities for volunteerism and philanthropy will empower citizens to be involved in their local area and responsive to the needs of those who live there. It will promote volunteering and the activity of voluntary and community organisations. The resettlement of the refugee families will also champion diversity and the contribution everyone makes to the borough's quality of life.

- 4.3 Settling families under the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) is also in line with the council's corporate 'Protection of Children' policy. Council officers will work closely with the Home Office's Refugee Resettlement Unit to ensure the council has suitable provision for those children deemed vulnerable under the UNHCR's international standards for child vulnerability, and in so doing become familiar with these standards.

5 The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme (SVPR)

- 5.1 In January 2014, the UK Government announced that it would establish a Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme to allow selected refugees to resettle in the UK. The programme was relatively small in scale, resettling 239 refugees up to the end of September 2015.
- 5.2 A parliamentary briefing paper, dated 12 February 2017, stated that in the 12 months to the end of September 2016, 4,162 people were resettled under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme. According to the Home Office's official Immigration Statistics, published 23 February 2017, 201 individuals were resettled in London between the fourth quarter of 2015 and the final quarter of 2016 (ending in December 2016). In order of the largest groups, these were: Barnet (41), Lambeth (26), Newham (26), Islington (25), Camden (12), Richmond (12), Hackney (11), Kensington & Chelsea (11), Kingston Upon Thames (8), City of London (7), Hammersmith & Fulham (3), Wandsworth (3).
- 5.3 Under the SVPR programme, Syrians registered as refugees with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, and who meet one or more of UNHCR's criteria for vulnerable groups, are eligible to be resettled in the UK. The National Audit Office's report on the programme, dated 8 September 2016, pointed out that just under half (49%) of all those resettled under the scheme are children under the age of 18. More than half (55%) were accepted onto the programme because they are survivors of torture or violence, or both.
- 5.4 Those resettled under the SVPR programme are granted Humanitarian Protection status for a period of five years. This confers eligibility to apply for support from public funds and access to the labour market. They are eligible to apply for family reunion with immediate family members, in accordance with the Immigration Rules. The Government has indicated that at the end of the five years, resettled refugees will be eligible to apply for permanent settlement in the UK.

6 Lewisham's Coordination of SVPR

- 6.1 Unlike in other regions of the UK, London does not have a regional coordinator for the programme. This means that lots of learning has been through informal meetings with other local authorities. In late 2016, Lewisham officers met with coordinating officers from Barnet, Camden, Hackney, Islington and Lambeth who helpfully shared their experiences thus far. In June 2016, the LGA guide 'Syrian refugee resettlement: A guide for local authorities' was published which also offered guidance on best practice.

- 6.2 The coordination of the SVPR programme has taken place through multiagency meetings at both Strategy and Operations level. Members of the Children and Young People, Crime and Community Development, Finance, Housing and Public Health departments have all been involved in developing the framework for Lewisham's resettlement structure as well as directly being involved with decisions around case referrals from the Home Office. Staff from the Lewisham Clinical Commissioning Group and Department for Work and Pensions have also been involved in the project.
- 6.3 Lewisham has successfully met the timetable outlined in the report for the Mayor and Cabinet meeting on 7 September 2016, to accept its first Syrian refugee households between January and March 2017.
- In September 2016, it entered into an agreement with the Home Office to participate in the programme following the Full Council meeting on 21 September 2016, and established a multi-agency support panel.
 - Between October and December 2016 the Council successfully procured the resettlement support service of SHP, which then began its official contract on 15th January 2017. It also began working with the voluntary sector, landlords and agencies known to the council to identify suitable accommodation at LHA rates.
 - In January we accepted our first referred case from the Home Office, and due to the 6-8 week time needed for the Home Office to organise pre-arrival orientation, medical screening, flights, etc., Lewisham's first family arrived in February 2017.
- 6.4 At present the Council has been able to make use of three offers of properties by non-commercial local landlords who wish to offer their property exclusively for the use of Syrian refugees. The National Audit Office's September 2016 report on the SVPR programme noted that only 11% of all refugees in the programme have so far been resettled in London and the South East, and puts this down to housing pressures. Despite this, the Council has sourced 8 offers of properties from commercial landlords willing to rent at Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate, and inspections of their suitability are currently taking place.

7 Commissioned Support

- 7.1 An open tender was put out to secure an appropriate resettlement support service to directly work with the households for the first 12 months of their arrival. Lewisham awarded the appointment of its resettlement support services to the charity SHP (formerly known as Single Homeless Project). SHP have a history of working with marginalised populations and have successfully been supporting families resettled under the SVPR programme in Lambeth Council.
- 7.2 SHP have been awarded an 18 month contract which formally began on 15 January 2017 with responsibility for:
- Liaising with landlords before the arrival of a family
 - Meeting and greeting refugees as they arrive at airports, escorting them to properties and briefing them on the use of amenities
 - Providing welcome packs on arrival including basic groceries

- The provision of a casework support service to signpost and coordinate education, welfare claims, employment and other integration services set out in individual “personalised support plans”
- Access to ESOL courses and translation services
- Coordinating offers of support from local community groups
- Collecting data which can be used to evaluate the programme

7.3 So far SHP have successfully welcomed two families, with children already at school, GP registrations have taken place, visits to JCP and ESOL coordinated. Arrangements have been made for SHP to submit monthly data on the refugee households, and also to collect data for deeper evaluation in line with the Home Office’s recommended criteria. This includes looking at:

- progress in English language classes, education and employment;
- involvement in voluntary work and community activities;
- secondary migration;
- and health outcomes.

7.4 The Home Office shares information about refugees’ experiences and mental health conditions prior to refugees’ arrival in the UK, although many local authorities have reported that this information has not always been as complete as it could be. For this reason, Lewisham’s Clinical Commissioning Group has agreed to use the funding it is able to claim under the scheme to extend its existing arrangements with the Guys and St Thomas Trust to offer the refugee families formal health screening on arrival. This will include a full one hour consultation with each patient, including various blood tests, within one month of arrival, followed by a further 30 minutes consultation – regardless of test results. A full report will also be compiled for GPs who the families register with, giving details of any treatment given and recommendations for further action. This will take place at the Pavilion Medical Centre in Lambeth, where a specialist clinical team will not only conduct the aforementioned medical tests, but also look out for any signs of trauma or mental health needs which may need further support.

7.5 None of those families who have been resettled thus far have had any level of English. This seems broadly in line with the experience of other local authorities. As a result, it is unlikely that households will become self-sufficient in the short to medium term. It has been agreed that the local authority tariff will be partly used to provide refugees with around four hours of structured and accredited English language tuition per week through the council’s existing partnership with Adult Learning Lewisham.

8 Community Offers of Support

8.1 Lewisham has an active and engaged voluntary and community sector willing to support the integration of Syrian households resettled in Lewisham. A directory of support has been developed to manage offers of support and donations from the local community, and these contacts are regularly updated by email. Key contacts have also been passed to the support provider SHP who has been liaising with the groups in order to meet the needs of the families.

8.2 On 20 January 2017 Lewisham Council held an event for interested groups and

individuals to meet SHP and discuss how they might offer support. Around 50 members of the community attended, listened to SHP's presentation on how they work, shared contact details and offered various forms of support, some of which has been taken up – for example, offers of ESOL lessons.

- 8.3 The Diocese of Southwark are housing one Syrian refugee family at LHA rate for at least 2 years in an unused vicarage, which has been furnished using funding covered by the Home Office's tariff for the family.
- 8.4 Lewisham Citizens (Citizens UK) have promoted the need for properties at LHA rate to local communities, and two landlords of 2-bedroom properties have come forward with suitable properties, one of which is now being used by a Syrian family and a second which will be in use from late March. These properties did not require furnishing, and the landlords have agreed to rent it at LHA rate to Syrian refugee families for at least 2 years.
- 8.5 Lewisham Islamic Centre held an independent fundraising event on 6 January 2017 in which they raised over £900 to fund items the families might need. This is being held by Citizens UK, who liaise with the caseworkers of SHP to buy items as they are needed – for example, English-Arabic dictionaries and welcoming hampers.
- 8.6 Various community groups have also offered the Syrian refugee families free English lessons or have invited them to join drop-in sessions they already run in the borough. These include: the Afghan and Central Asian Association (ACAA), Action for Refugees in Lewisham (AFRIL), Catford Community Church, Holy Trinity Centre, Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network (LRMN) and St Margaret's Church, Lee.
- 8.7 Ten local restaurants have agreed to offer a Syrian refugee family a free meal. These are Meze Mangal in Brockley; Damascus Chef in Hither Green and Lee; Aloosh in New Cross; Spice of Life in Lee High Road; Big Fat Gourmet in Lewisham; Haidy's in Lewisham; Cafe of Good Hope in Hither Green; Good Hope Café in Ladywell; Turkuaz in Catford; Le Delice Ladywell.

9 Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme (VCRS)

- 9.1 In April 2016 the Government announced that as well as the 20,000 Syrian refugees the UK would accept, it would also accept 3,000 vulnerable and at risk children and their families under the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) from the same Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region as the SVPR programme. This was originally known as the 'Children At Risk' scheme.
- 9.2 All refugee resettlement, including both the VCRS and SVPR programme, are the joint responsibility of the 'Refugee Resettlement Unit' which the Council already liaises with, made up of staff from the Home Office, the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Department for International Development.
- 9.3 Lewisham is yet to resettle any although this report seeks approval to do so. The

Refugee Resettlement Unit has already asked the Council about possible cases if it wishes to participate in VCRS and officers are ready to begin accepting the families through the same systems and processes as SVPR.

- 9.4 Other local authorities who have successfully participated in VCRS include Lambeth and Islington.
- 9.5 The MENA region in this case refers to Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey, although it must be noted that though families referred by the VCRS are currently residing in these countries, they can be of any nationality.
- 9.6 Besides the situation in Syria, there are various other conflicts in the region, most notably in Iraq. Since January 2014, the escalating violence in Iraq has led to the internal displacement of more than 3.4 million Iraqi people. In particular, there has been large-scale displacement from Mosul. The UNHCR estimates that over 10 million Iraqis currently require some form of humanitarian assistance. Turkey continues to host more than half of the over 230,000 registered Iraqi refugees in the region.
- 9.7 VCRS families will receive the same funding levels as those in the current SVPR scheme, with access to the exceptional circumstances fund, the same five years 'Humanitarian Protection Visa', the same rights to family reunification, and will arrive and then be supported via the same process as the Syrian families.
- 9.8 The vulnerability criteria used by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to select cases for the VCRS is as follows:
- Children with specific medical needs
 - Children with disabilities
 - Child survivors of (or at risk of) violence, abuse or exploitation including sexual and gender based violence
 - Children at risk of harmful traditional practices (eg child marriage and FGM)
 - Children without legal documentation
 - Children in detention
 - Children at risk of refoulement
 - Children at risk of not attending school
 - Children associated with armed forces or armed groups
 - Children at risk of child labour or already working
 - Child carers

10 Equality Impact Analysis

- 10.1 The main impacts identified are that the VCRS in Lewisham will have a positive equality impact primarily on BME communities as all refugees being resettled will be from BME backgrounds. The VCRS will offer those who are resettled the only chance of a durable solution to their protracted situation. Refugees may also have other protected characteristics which may be relevant to their resettlement need and this would be addressed as part of the individualised support they received.

11 Financial Implications

- 11.1 Individuals granted Humanitarian Protection Status were previously unable to claim Personal Independence Payment (PIP) or Disability benefits for the first two years of residency. However, in January 2017 the DWP confirmed that following a tribunal case in March 2016 the 'Past Presence Test' (which required all claimants of Personal Independence Payments (PIP), Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Attendance Allowance (AA) and Carer's Allowance (CA) to have been present in the UK for a certain length of time, usually two out of three years) will no longer apply to those with Humanitarian Protection or refugee status, and therefore families resettled through the Syrian Resettlement Programme and the Vulnerable Children's Scheme are now entitled to these benefits on arrival to the UK.
- 11.2 Families which have been resettled in Lewisham under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme have been done so fully using the funding provided by the Home Office's Refugee Resettlement Unit. None of the £50000 budgetary provision set aside for contingency costs and administration of the Lewisham Refugee Offer has been used, nor is it anticipated that it will be used.
- 11.3 The Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme is funded in exactly the same way as the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement programme.
- 11.4 Referrals from the Home Office thus far have been largely from Arabic-speaking nationalities, such as Iraq. This would have no financial implications since the interpreters provided by the commissioned support provider SHP have Arabic-speaking interpreters in place, and hence we would accept families which speak English or Arabic.
- 11.5 Both the level of funding and the delivery mechanism are the same across the VCRS and SVPR scheme. Consequently the financial implications are the same across both schemes.
- 11.6 Should the Council accept more than 10 refugee families in total, it must be ensured Home Office funding is able to fully cover their needs.
- 11.7 The current support provider SHP is contracted for an 18 month period from January 2017, with each family due to receive a maximum of 12 months' support. If there are any families which still require support after June 2018 – ie who arrive after June 2017 and have needs which mean they require a full 12 months' support - the council will consider separate options for covering this support.

12 Legal Implications

- 12.1 Participation in the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) is voluntary and, like the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement (SVPR) programme, is a matter for decision by each local authority. The Home Office has issued clear requirements of authorities which decide to contribute to the programme, and any Local Authority which agrees to resettle refugees under both the VCRS and the SVPR programme must satisfy the Home Office that they

have the relevant services and infrastructure in place.

- 12.2 There is no statutory duty for the Council to participate in either resettlement programme although mandatory quotas could be introduced, for example through the Immigration Bill 2015/2016, in the event there are not enough places available nationally.
- 12.3 The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) introduced a new public sector equality duty (the equality duty or the duty). It covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 12.4 In summary, the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.5 The duty continues to be a “have regard duty”, and the weight to be attached to it is a matter for the Mayor, bearing in mind the issues of relevance and proportionality. It is not an absolute requirement to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity or foster good relations.
- 12.6 The Equality and Human Rights Commission issued Technical Guidance on the Public Sector Equality Duty and statutory guidance entitled “Equality Act 2010 Services, Public Functions & Associations Statutory Code of Practice”. The Council must have regard to the statutory code in so far as it relates to the duty and attention is drawn to Chapter 11 which deals particularly with the equality duty. The Technical Guidance also covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty. This includes steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The guidance does not have statutory force but nonetheless regard should be had to it, as failure to do so without compelling reason would be of evidential value. The statutory code and the technical guidance can be found at: <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-andpolicy/equality-act/equality-act-codes-of-practice-and-technical-guidance/>
- 12.7 The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has previously issued five guides for public authorities in England giving advice on the equality duty:
- The essential guide to the public sector equality duty
 - Meeting the equality duty in policy and decision-making
 - Engagement and the equality duty
 - Equality objectives and the equality duty
 - Equality information and the equality duty

The essential guide provides an overview of the equality duty requirements including the general equality duty, the specific duties and who they apply to. It

covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty including steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The other four documents provide more detailed guidance on key areas and advice on good practice. Further information and resources are available at: <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/public-sectorequality-duty/guidance-on-the-equality-duty/>

13 Crime and Disorder Implications

13.1 There are no specific crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

14 Environmental Implications

14.1 There are no specific environmental implications arising from this report.

15 Background documents and originator

15.1 A report on the resettlement of Syrian refugee households was given to Full Council on 7 September 2016 and can be reviewed here <http://councilmeetings.lewisham.gov.uk/documents/s45111/Syrian%20Refugees.pdf>

15.2 If you would like any further information on this report please contact Genevieve Macklin (020 8314 6057) or Nicola Marven (020 8314 7227)

Other Formal UK Resettlement Programmes

1 Historic

- 1.1 Refugees have been resettled in the UK through specific programmes following emergencies. For example, 42,000 Ugandan Asians during 1972–74, 22,500 Vietnamese during 1979–92 (for which, Lewisham took in more Vietnamese than any other local authority in the UK), over 2,500 Bosnians in the 1990s, and over 4,000 Kosovars in 1999.
- 1.2 The Ten or More Plan, established by UNHCR in 1973 and administered in the UK by the British Red Cross, is a very small initiative for refugees requiring medical attention not available in their current location. The programme serves ten or more people per year.
- 1.3 The Mandate Refugee Programme has operated since 1995 and allows individuals to claim asylum while overseas if they have a close family member in the UK who is willing to accommodate them. The programme assists approximately 300 people per year and is coordinated by the UNHCR.
- 1.4 The UK Gateway Protection Programme was launched in 2004 and offers a legal route for up to 750 UNHCR-identified refugees, who have been displaced for at least five years, to be resettled in the United Kingdom each year.

2 Contemporary

- 2.1 The UK government supported the closure of the informal refugee camp in Calais, France, known as ‘the Jungle’, which was completed in October 2016. As an unofficial camp, no official statistics were available on its population, although estimates around the time of its closure quoted by the BBC put the population figure at around 10,000 with 1000 of these being children. Around 500 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASCs) were transferred to the UK in 2016 from this camp. They were transferred under an accelerated process based on the family reunion criteria of the Dublin Regulation. Lewisham has reunited 6 UASCs with family members through this scheme.
- 2.2 As part of the Immigration Act which came into force in May 2016, an amendment was included (Section 67, known as the ‘Dubs Amendment’) which would require the Home Secretary to arrange for the resettlement in the UK of an unspecified number of unaccompanied refugee children from Greece, Italy and France. Charities had expected the total number resettled to be around 3000. The Government has declined to publish the number of places pledged by each local authority area for unaccompanied refugee children. Lewisham indicated that it could accommodate 23 of these children, and has resettled one child through this means. However, on 8 February 2017 the government announced that 200 child refugees had been transferred from France to Britain under the Dubs scheme, and that there would be a final wave of only 150 more, to bring the total

number to 350 before it ends.

- 2.3 In July 2016 the Home Secretary launched a 'community sponsorship scheme' with the purpose of empowering and enabling community groups to welcome and support a refugee family resettled in the UK. The UK Parliament's Public Accounts Committee wrote in their report of 13 January 2017 that it had supported small numbers of refugees so far and 'it is not yet clear how it [the community sponsorship scheme] will complement, rather than compete with, the local authority resettlement route.' The Home Office asks groups who apply to run a community sponsorship scheme whether or not they have your local authority's agreement to bring in refugees to the area. Thus far Lewisham has not been approached with regards to this.