

Mayor and Cabinet			
<b>Report Title</b>	Resettlement of Syrian Refugees	<b>Item No</b>	
<b>Contributors</b>	Executive Director for Customer Services, Head of Law		
<b>Class</b>	Part 1	<b>Date</b>	20 September 2018

## 1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To support the manifesto commitment to expand the Council's current refugee resettlement programme, with a target of resettling a further 100 refugee households. This commitment is also a key element of the manifesto commitment for Lewisham to act as a sanctuary borough, protecting the rights of all migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

## 2. Policy Context:

- 2.1 The proposed recommendations support the achievements of the Sustainable Community Strategy policy objectives:

- Ambitious and achieving: where people are inspired and supported to fulfil their potential.
- Empowered and responsible: where people can be actively involved in their local area and contribute to tolerant, caring and supportive local communities.
- Healthy, active and enjoyable: where people can actively participate in maintaining and improving their health and well-being, supported by high quality health and care services, leisure, culture and recreational activities.

The recommendations also support the corporate strategic objectives:

- Community leadership and empowerment: developing opportunities for the active participation and engagement of people in the life of the community
- Decent homes for all: investment in social and affordable housing to achieve the decent homes standard and tackle homelessness

- 2.2 It will also help meet the objectives of the Lewisham Housing Strategy in which the Council commits to:

- Helping residents at times of severe and urgent housing need
- Building the homes our residents need
- Greater security and quality for private renter
- Promoting greater quality in the social and private rented sectors

### **3. Summary**

- 3.1 In September 2015 the Prime Minister announced that the UK Government would resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020 under the Home Office's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme. On 21<sup>st</sup> April 2016 the Government announced it would take an additional 3000 children and adults from the Middle East and North Africa Region MENA region, regardless of their nationality, many of whom have fled the conflict in Syria, under the Vulnerable Persons Relocations Scheme (VPRS).
- 3.2 As of March 2018 just over 11,500 Syrian refugees have been resettled in the UK, and 567 individuals have been resettled in London.
- 3.3 Currently 24 London boroughs, including Lewisham, are directly resettling refugees under the VPRS. In addition, a further two, Merton and Sutton, are supporting community sponsorship groups engaged in resettling families.
- 3.4 In September 2016, the Council approved a policy of resettling initially 10 refugee families. The Council has already delivered on its commitment and resettled 75 individuals from 15 families.
- 3.5 The manifesto pledge made in May 2018 by the current Mayor is for Lewisham to become a sanctuary borough, protecting the rights of all migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. Part of this commitment is to expand Lewisham's refugee resettlement programme, with a target of resettling a further 100 refugee families. Lewisham's ethnic and cultural diversity, and its experience in integrating newcomers, make it ideally placed to respond to the needs of these families and integrate them into the community.
- 3.6 The Government has put in place a funding offer to local authorities that contributes towards the costs of delivering support and other services to refugee households. The current financial offer from Government is due to continue until 2020, and it is unclear what future funding will be available post 2020. The Home Office have set standard financial support rates for each eligible beneficiary, with additional funding to cover the cost of educational needs of children. Exceptional, additional funding may also be available for those with additional health, care and educational needs. Lewisham Council will be writing to the Secretary of State to request an extension of funding to continue the local authority's efforts to integrate the new households.
- 3.7 This report seeks approval for the resettlement of up to 100 Syrian & other refugee households in Lewisham.

### **4. Recommendations**

It is recommended that Mayor and Cabinet:

- 4.1 Approves the proposed timetable for receiving the further 100 households in the borough, under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement scheme (and the Vulnerable Children's Scheme) as set out in para 8.3
- 4.2 Notes the proposed expansion of the Lewisham Syrian Refugee Offer and agrees to the tendering and appointment of a support resettlement service.
- 4.3 Notes that the offer now proposes the Council works with its partners and local organisations to scale up and commission new support services as appropriate. The offer is set-out at Appendix 1.
- 4.4 Notes that the Government funding arrangements is only up until 2020 and that funding beyond this is not clear. It is proposed that the Mayor and Cabinet Member for Refugees write to the Home Secretary requesting an extension of the Government's current pledge to continue to support the resettlement of vulnerable refugees.

## **5. Background**

- 5.1 Conflict in Syria began over 7 years ago and continues today with no signs of imminent resolution. Much of the country is in ruins with many of the major cities having been badly attacked during the conflict including major cities such as Damascus, Homs and Aleppo. Since the conflict began in March 2011 between 350,000 and 500,000 Syrian people, of which over 8000 have been children, and predominantly civilians have been casualties or killed. It is estimated that over 5 million Syrian people have fled the country since the start of the conflict, making it one of the largest refugee exoduses since the Second World War. In particular, many highly vulnerable refugees have fled conflict to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.
- 5.2 To resettle families, the Government works with the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHCR) to identify the most vulnerable Syrian refugees who have already fled Syria and sought temporary refuge in neighbouring countries principally Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. Those who cannot be supported effectively in their temporary host country and who are unable to return to Syria are prioritised for resettlement. The Home Office have been and continue to carry out medical and security checks and then route cases to participating local authorities, to either accept or reject. The Government extended the scope of the resettlement scheme in April 2016 to enable the UNHCR to refer the most vulnerable refugees in the MENA region who have fled the Syrian conflict, regardless of their nationality.
- 5.3 The UK Government has committed to provide funding to contribute towards covering the costs of resettling refugees in the UK from the international aid budget. At the 2015 spending review the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the provision of an estimated £460 million over the spending review period to cover the first 12 months' costs under the scheme. The Government has committed a further £129 million to assist with local authority costs over years 2-5 of the scheme. Further funding will be available for "extreme" high

cost cases where there is a severe disability or care need. Syrian Refugees (and others resettled under one of the Schemes) are given Humanitarian Protection status for 5 years and are entitled to work and claim welfare benefits in the United Kingdom.

5.4 In order to ensure the effective integration of resettled refugees, local authorities need to be able to meet the Home Office's Statement of Outcomes for the programme which includes:

- Meeting and greeting refugees as they arrive at airports, escorting them to properties and briefing them on the use of amenities
- The provision of suitable, affordable and sustainable accommodation which meets the local authority's standards and is available for at least one year.
- Accommodation is to be basically furnished and supplied with essential white goods.
- Welcome packs on arrival including basic groceries, clothing and a £200 cash payment per household member.
- The provision of a case work 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

## **6. London Context**

6.1 London has a unique history of providing refuge to those seeking sanctuary but faces a unique set of challenges. London boroughs already struggle to find affordable accommodation for those currently in housing need. 55,000 homeless households are currently living in temporary accommodation predominantly in the Private Rented Sector across London.

6.2 The Home Office continues to indicate that accommodation sought for Syrian and other refugees should be at Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates; in London the majority of PRS rents are above LHA rates. The number of 2 bedroom properties available to rent in Lewisham at LHA in the PRS continues to decrease, and this pattern is reflected across property sizes in the borough. In addition to the lack of affordable accommodation, caps to welfare benefits make it increasingly unaffordable for large families requiring 3 or more bedrooms to live in London. In response to this, the Home Office has agreed with the UNHCR to re-model the cohort profile of refugees so that London resettles smaller families and, where feasible, those people with more complex needs due to the proximity of services and amenities.

6.3 The Home Office proposed in 2015 that 2,500 households be resettled in London. So far in London, 567 households of different sizes and needs have been resettled by twenty four different boroughs. Accommodation has been provided in the private rented sector in the London area, and a significant proportion of those properties offered through the efforts of charities and faith groups.

## **7. Lewisham - The Sanctuary Borough**

- 7.1 Locally, Lewisham has made significant progress in establishing itself as a safe sanctuary for refugees, having taken in fifteen families between February 2017 and December 2017. Most of these families are made up of two generations (ie. parents and children) but the borough is housing a family made up of grandparents, parents and their children. In addition, the borough is accommodating two families where the father is absent (or deceased), so there are two families with a lone parent (the mother) raising her children. The families vary in size from between three and six individuals - with two families of six having four children each. The former occupations of the refugees before arriving in the UK are diverse, including accountants and lawyers as well as taxi drivers and butchers.
- 7.2 The generosity of the local community in helping with the resettlement of the refugee families has been heart-warming. It is important to note in particular that a substantial number of the properties (eight out of fifteen) have been provided by philanthropic residents in the borough who were happy to rent their properties to the refugee families at a significantly lower rate than they might have received at competitive market rates. The voluntary and faith sector has also risen to the challenge with Lewisham Citizens, Lewisham Refugees and Migrants Network, Action for Refugees in Lewisham and Greenwich Refugee Aid and Community Enterprise GRACE providing invaluable assistance. Local churches, the mosque and synagogue communities have also assisted through fund raising and generous donations.
- 7.3 Rapid acquisition of the English language is critical to ensuring the effective integration of refugee families and it is encouraging that all of the adult family members have been attending ESOL courses since their arrival in the borough. Their children are settling into local schools. Entrepreneurial activity has already been gaining momentum with one of the female refugees setting up a catering business. This is in addition to four individuals in full time employment and one volunteering. Given the professional and educational backgrounds of some of the families it is reasonable to assume many more of the households will eventually provide an economic stimulus to the borough.

## **8 Continuing Lewisham's Offer**

- 8.1 Lewisham would like to put in place arrangements to continue to resettle up to 100 vulnerable households under the Vulnerable People Resettlement Scheme and honour the manifesto pledge in 2018.
- 8.2 Lewisham will continue with developing upon the existing Syrian Refugee Offer Policy in line with current guidance provided by the Government and will work in partnership with local community groups, the GLA and other London boroughs participating in the scheme.
- 8.3 An outline timetable for accepting and resettling cases is outlined below

Time table for accepting the additional households.
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Date	Activity
September 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Put the Home Office on notice that agreement has been made to accept 100 additional households post Full Council meeting.</li> <li>• Re-establish the multi-agency support panel (including housing, health, DWP, education, resettlement, support service provider and other third sector agencies)</li> <li>• Recruit a full-time Refugee Programme Manager.</li> </ul>
October – December 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Procure resettlement service.</li> <li>• Review housing delivery strategy to ensure that we are able to provide sufficient units across the Strategic Housing division. Proposal to be presented to Mayor and Cabinet.</li> <li>• Work with the Voluntary Sector, Landlords and agencies known to the Council to identify suitable accommodation at LHA rates.</li> </ul>
January – 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree households with the Home Office</li> <li>• Begin accepting households.</li> </ul>

- 8.4 Once a household is accepted, then it is typically 6-8 weeks before their arrival at a London airport. Coordination and in-house support, and possibly commissioned support services need to be in place ahead of arrival in the UK. In addition to the property being prepared, local services such as schools, the job centre, doctors, dentists, etc will need to be aware of the new family or families and how it will impact upon their services. Also, in certain instances, special provision will need to be made in case member(s) of the household(s) have special/specific needs and requirements such as specialist medical care, etc.

### **Accommodation**

- 8.5 There are currently just under 2,000 homeless households in temporary accommodation in Lewisham, over 400 of which are placed in accommodation outside of the borough. Accommodation for refugees in Lewisham will be secured from a range of sources including the community, private rent sector, and local authority acquisitions in line with the approach of other participating London boroughs. All London boroughs who have accepted Syrian refugees as part of the VPRS to date have accommodated households in the private rented sector (PRS) rather than social housing. It is required by the Home Office that the families are housed in the borough which has accepted them. High demands on social housing from homeless families waiting in temporary accommodation for many years and the limited 5 year Humanitarian Protection Status awarded to Syrian refugees makes PRS the most appropriate offer of accommodation in London.

- 8.6 Issues around the affordability of PRS accommodation in Lewisham mean that it will be necessary to rely on community goodwill when sourcing appropriate accommodation for the refugee households. Offers of accommodation from the local voluntary and community sector have already been utilised to resettle existing families, and this generosity will continue to be important for future delivery. Any offer of accommodation from the local community needs to be assessed and shown to be independent, self-contained, available to rent at LHA or below, and meet with the suitability standards of both the local authority and the Home Office.
- 8.7 There is a significant gap between the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) entitlement payable to welfare benefit claimants and the market rents charged in the PRS in Lewisham. Shortfalls in accommodation costs for Syrian refugees would need to either be paid for through the local authority settlement received for the household, reducing the amount available to spend on support, or through the council's existing DHP budget or general fund sources. The table below highlights the difference between market rents and LHA rates in Lewisham

	<b>1 Bed</b>	<b>2 Bed</b>	<b>3 Bed</b>	<b>4 Bed</b>
Median Weekly rent - Lewisham	£252	£300	£386	£462
LHA Rate – Inner SE London	£204	£265	£331	£417
LHA Rate – Outer SE London	£161	£198	£242	£313

- 8.8 In addition to LHA restrictions the benefit cap is now £442.31 per week for couples with children in London. LHA for a 4 bed property in parts of Lewisham in the Inner South east London area is £417, making larger properties unaffordable for households dependent on welfare benefits. In order that families are able to access affordable accommodation it is recommended that Lewisham only commits to smaller households requiring no more than three bed properties.
- 8.9 As a result of the housing crisis it is unlikely that we will be able to resettle all households into the PRS. We are reviewing our housing delivery strategy to ensure that we can provide sufficient units across the Strategic Housing Division. Officers are currently preparing proposals and recommendations will be presented to Mayor and Cabinet before the end of the calendar year.

## **9. Household Support Needs**

- 9.1 The Home Office provided the following table as guidance to understanding the complexity of each of the families, which should be noted and used when considering the families to resettle in the borough.

Cat 1.	Non Complex case: those with no special needs or requirements.
Cat 2a.	Mobility Issues: people who are wheelchair users or who have other disabilities including missing limbs or restrictive movement
Cat 2b.	Serious Medical: people who require surgery or ongoing medical treatment for life threatening condition (eg. Cancer, dialysis)
Cat 2c.	Psychological: people suffering from mental illness or those where a need for immediate support is specified in the HAP
Cat 2d.	Special Education needs: children or adults with disabilities or learning difficulties
Cat 3.	Large Families of groups of 7 or more

9.2 Dependent upon the type of properties procured and the level of need, Lewisham is proposing to accommodate households in all categories except category 3 due to difficulties in procuring large family properties at LHA in the borough.

## **10. Financial Implications**

10.1 Funding for 15 families was agreed by the Home Office and these 15 families have been settled. This report requests approval for 100 families in addition to the 15 already settled. It should be noted that there is no guarantee that funding will be secured from the Home Office for the additional 100 families, or that funding for any of these 100 families, as well as the initial 15, be available after 2020. A request will be made to Secretary of State for the extension of funding after 2020.

10.2 Private Rented Sector housing the most appropriate type of accommodation for refugees with 5-year Humanitarian Protection Status. There is currently a gap between Local Authority Housing Allowance rates and market rents in the borough, meaning there is a reduction in the amount of funding available for support of the families, after the payment of housing costs from this funding. Discretionary Housing Payments could be used to provide some funding for this gap, or alternatively, funding would have to be found from general fund sources. At present, 8 of the 15 properties rented on behalf of the initial 15 families in resettlement programme, are rented at a reduced rate, through the goodwill of property owners in the borough. It is unlikely that additional accommodation at a reduced rate could be sourced for additional families.

10.4 Syrian Refugee households accommodated under the VPRS will be granted Humanitarian Protection Status for 5 years. At the end of this period, it is currently believed that they will be entitled to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILDR) and to apply for British Citizenship. Each individual's application will be judged upon its own merits. Due to the lack of affordable accommodation in London, smaller families and those with more complex

needs are settled in London. High needs households and more senior members of the community may be less likely to access the labour market and become self-sustaining in the 5-year period. If their application for ILR is refused, then there is a risk that these households will have no recourse to public funds, resulting in additional costs to the council's general fund.

### **Current SRP Funding Arrangements – 15 families**

- 10.5 The Government has set aside a basic amount of just over £20,000 in resettlement funding per household member across 5 years to be paid directly to local authorities. The following table shows the profile of the funding over the 5 years. No current official guidance is provided as to how the budget and funding is to be handled by each of the local authorities. Funding will be tapered from year one, reducing to £1,000 in year 5 of the resettlement programme. Local authorities have freedom to decide how best to use the funding in years 2-5. The payments are made to each local authority three times (Initial, Subsequent, Final) over the year, starting the month in which the families arrive in the borough.

Syrian Resettlement Programme – Local Authority Settlement Years 1-5						
Year	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Funding per person	£8,520	£5,000	£3,700	£2,300	£1000	£20,520

- 10.6 In year one, funding will be made to local authorities throughout the first 12 month period in arrears, after a household has been accepted, with 40% of expected yearly costs for each individual to be authorised on the day of arrival and paid to the Council within 30 days. The remainder will be paid in arrears in two equal instalments at the end of the fourth and eighth month. This funding covers a range of expenditure including the following

- any shortfall between rent charged and Local Housing Allowance
- furniture, white goods, soft furnishings
- initial cash payment (normally £200) and grocery welcome pack
- Local authority coordination, finance and administration, the funding will be used to cover the additional salary costs of a FTE Refugee Resettlement Coordinator.
- Caseworker(s)
- English as a second language (ESOL) tuition/support costs

- 10.7 In addition to the basic amount of funding per individual household member, there will also be additional funding for education costs for children as set out in the following table. The funding is provided in the first year only, for children aged between 5 and 18 years old (£4,500) and for children aged 3 to 4 years old (£2,250). This will be paid to the local authority and passed on to schools and is above the funding provided to schools per pupil by the Department of Education.

- 10.8 Additional funding is also available for exceptional circumstances or “high cost cases” for educational purposes for children under the age of 18 on a case-by-case basis.

Syrian Resettlement Programme - Local Authority Settlement					
Local Authority Costs	Adult Benefit Claimant	Other Adults	Children 5-18	Children 3-4	Children under 3
	£8,250	£8,250	£8,250	£8,250	£8,250
Education	£0	£0	£4,500	£2,250	£0
<b>Total</b>	<b>£8,520</b>	<b>£8,520</b>	<b>£12,750</b>	<b>£10,500</b>	<b>£8,250</b>

#### 10.9 Funding for Social Care

The Home Office have advised that there is additional funding available for “high cost cases” where there are compelling circumstances that require additional social care costs. These costs can be requested on a case by case basis and will be assessed individually by the Home Office. Information on funding levels and demand for additional funding is not yet available. Individuals granted Humanitarian Protection Status are not able to claim Personal Independence Payment (PIP) or Disability benefits for the first two years of residency.

#### 10.10 Funding for Primary and Secondary Medical Care

Funding for primary and secondary care will be paid directly to local CCG by the Government. CCG’s will need to apply for medical care costs per household and can claim £600 per person for primary medical care costs and £2000 per person for Secondary care costs.

### 11. Legal Implications

- 11.1 Participation in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS) and related refugee schemes is voluntary and 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 the SVPRS must satisfy the Home Office that they have the relevant services and infrastructure in place.
- 11.2 In July 2017 the Home Secretary announced the expansion of the VPRS to include other nationalities that have fled Syria, acknowledging other groups that have also been displaced by the conflict. The expansion is with immediate effect, and the scheme will now cover vulnerable refugees in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, local authorities might receive non-Syrian nationals as well as Syrian nationals through the VPRS from July 2017.
- 11.3 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.

- 11.4 In summary, the Council must, in the exercise of its function, have due regard to the need to:
- (a) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act;
  - (b) advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;
  - (c) foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 11.5 The duty continues to be a “have regard duty”, and the weight to be attached to it is a matter for the decision maker, 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.
- 11.6 The Equality and Human Rights Commission has recently 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:  
<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/technical-guidance-public-sector-equality-duty-england>
- 11.7 The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has previously issued five guides for public authorities in England giving advice on the equality duty:
1. The essential guide to the public sector equality duty
  2. Meeting the equality duty in policy and decision-making
  3. Engagement and the equality duty
  4. Equality objectives and the equality duty
  5. Equality information and the equality duty
- 11.8 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:  
<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/public-sector-equality-duty-guidance>

## **12 Equalities Implications**

- 12.1 The main impacts identified are that the SRP in Lewisham will have a positive equality impact primarily on BME communities, as all refugees being resettled will be from BME backgrounds. The SRP 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 receive, for example, some of the refugees who are resettled may have suffered persecution on the basis of their sexuality or religion.

## **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 Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement (VPR) Programme, Guidance for local authorities and partners, The Home Office, July 2017  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/631369/170711\\_Syrian\\_Resettlement\\_Updated\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_final.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/631369/170711_Syrian_Resettlement_Updated_Fact_Sheet_final.pdf)
- 15.2 Syrian Refugee Resettlement, A guide for local authorities, LGA & Migration Yorkshire, Spring 2016  
  
<https://www.local.gov.uk/syrian-refugee-resettlement-guide-local-authorities>
- 15.3 If you would like any further information on this report please contact Genevieve Macklin (0208 314 6057) or Lee Georgiou (0208 3147007).