

REPORT TO: Executive Board
DATE: 25 February 2016
REPORTING OFFICER: Chief Executive
PORTFOLIO HOLDER: Leader
SUBJECT: Syrian Refugee Crisis
WARDS: Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The report sets out the situation in Syria and the current response from Central Government and at a local level. It also outlines the definition of refugees, and asylum seekers and what that means for Local Authorities.

1.2 Halton is working collaboratively with all the NW local authorities in respect of this agenda and is part of the Merseyside sub regional group. Locally the Council is developing measures to fully engage with communities, statutory and non-statutory agencies, including the faith and voluntary sector to improve the understanding of the refugee crisis and the implications this has for Halton and the wider NW.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That Council

- 1) support the COMPASS and VPR programme;**
- 2) work with all the North West local authorities to establish a robust operational mechanism to oversee and deliver the programme; and**
- 3) learn from the examples of best practice nationally, to ensure that Halton provides effective humanitarian support, which is measured and proportionate, and takes into account the needs of those relocated under the programme and Halton's existing communities.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The UK Government have been taking part in the Syrian Resettlement Programme to offer support and assistance to refugees who have fled their home countries. Since 2011, the UK has granted humanitarian protection to almost 5.000 Syrians via the normal immigration procedures. A further 216 people have been

relocated under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Application Scheme.

3.2 The following is detailed definition of refugee and asylum seeker status:

- **Refugee** A person owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, is outside the country of his nationality and unable to or unwilling to return due to the level of fear and persecution. In accordance with immigration process a person is officially a refugee when they have their claim for asylum accepted.
- **Asylum Seeker** A person who has left their country of origin and has formally applied for asylum within another country, which has not been concluded.

3.3 Central Government is looking to increase the number of Local Authorities participating in asylum dispersal and resettlement schemes.

All local authorities in the NW, including Halton, have intimated that, in addition to participating in the asylum dispersal process, they are willing to support an agreed and proportionate number of Syrian Refugees through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPR). The number of refugees who may be relocated to Halton is anticipated to be less than 100.

This report seeks authority to confirm Halton's formal agreement to participate.

There are two schemes that run parallel with one another.

The Asylum Dispersal Programme (COMPASS)

The existing asylum dispersal scheme is called COMPASS (Commercial and Operational Managers, Procuring Asylum Support Services) across the UK. The Home Office has contracted with one private sector provider Serco to provide asylum accommodation, transport and support.

Asylum seekers entering the country independently are required to seek asylum and undergo the immigration process. The appointed agent, Serco, manage the temporary accommodation and Urgent Care 24 the healthcare of this client group. The migrants are placed into temporary accommodation funded directly by the Home Office pending the immigration control decision on their application. These clients do not have recourse to public funds or services and are NOT the responsibility of the local authority.

3.4 The provider for the North West, Serco is required by the COMPASS contract to consult with Local Authorities on the

procurement of dispersal accommodation. The only exception to this is when temporary dispersal accommodation is needed and asylum seekers can be placed in a Borough, with no consultation with the Council.

3.5 There have been no placements within the Borough since January 2016.

3.6 **The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPR)**

The expansion of this scheme will enable a further 20,000 Syrian refugees to be admitted to the UK by 2020. As part of Central Government commitment to take migrants directly from the effected Syrian camps and relocate to the United Kingdom. This client group will undergo the necessary health and immigration process prior to entering the country. This client group will be awarded five-year humanitarian protection.

3.7 All Local Authorities across the North West have intimated that they are prepared to make a commitment and confirmed their willingness to support the VPR programme. This report seeks authority to confirm Halton's formal agreement to participate.

The Home Office position remains that only refugees meeting the following criteria will be relocated to the UK through the above scheme:

- Refugees identified by the United Nation Refugee agency (UNHCR) will be eligible for relocation. These will be people who are within the refugee camps in countries outside of Syria and not the people who have left Syria and are presently within Europe.
- Survivors of torture and violence, women and children at risk and those in need of medical care will be prioritised.
- Individuals identified by UNHCR are allowed to bring their immediate families with them; this is limited to one spouse/partner and their minor dependent children under the age of 18. There is no provision for refugees to bring over age dependent relatives unless they meet the vulnerability criteria in their own right or the Home Office is satisfied that there is an existing dependency.
- Generally families will consist of between 4 – 6 people (including the head of the family) however, cases will also consist of single people and the occasional larger families.
- Individuals and families will be subject to immigration and visa checks within the camps and will only be eligible for relocation once this has been completed. They will then be granted humanitarian protection, giving them right to remain within the accepting country for a period of five years. Upon arrival in the country, this will give them full access to employment

opportunities, public funds and services.

- At the end of the five year period, if they have not been able to return to Syria, they may be eligible to apply for resettlement within the UK. Settlement may be refused if the person is convicted of a criminal offense and will be refused if they pose a danger to the public or national security.
- Medical reports will be submitted by the International Organisation for Immigration in advance of arrival. Following this assessment, and the consideration of broader needs, Local Authorities confirm with the Home Office whether or not they are able to accept the specific referral

3.8 The UK Government has indicated that concerted efforts will be made to place Syrian Refugees equitably across the country to ensure that no one Council is disproportionately affected. It expects Councils to take an innovative approach, working in close partnership with communities and voluntary sector. The Local Authorities will be responsible for sourcing accommodation and ensuring refugees are integrated into the community and/or helped to relocate back to their home country if circumstances change.

3.9 **The Role of the Local Authorities**

Each local authority in the NW will take the lead role to work with local partners to ensure that arrivals are provided with suitable accommodation and that the specific needs of this vulnerable group are met. This includes securing the prior sign up of local partners, the Clinical Commissioning Group and local NHS England area team, to facilitate access to primary and secondary healthcare providers, adult social care, education and housing. In Halton, the Council is also engaging with the voluntary, community and faith sector to help support refugees located in Halton.

3.10 There will be a requirement for all Local Authorities to have a multi-agency assessment panel to assess the capacity of the area to support the individuals and families identified by the Home Office as being suitable for relocation in the UK. The decision to take refugees is largely dependent upon the availability of Housing, school placements and appropriate services within each Local Authority district.

3.11 Councils can request a particular make up of cases from the Home Office, and it is likely that they will be given a minimum of 4-5 weeks' notice of new arrivals and longer for any cases with complex care needs. Halton is working as part of the NW local authority network. In the Liverpool City Region the local authorities are taking a collaborative approach with Liverpool City Council taking the lead, with David Parr as the Lead Chief Executive. Liverpool City Council will be the grant agreement holder with the Home Office and will put in place operating agreements with the other LCR authorities.

3.12 **Funding**

Central Government will meet the costs of the arrivals in terms of orientation, support, health and education costs for the first year, with reducing support in years 2 – 5. Staffing costs to cover administration of the scheme will also be met. However, it is not yet clear if a cap will be placed on the maximum amount of funding available for individual health, social and education needs. The financial support is expected for the list of requirements below:

- Reception and travel costs to the receiving area
- The actual costs of upto two months void costs when securing accommodation, plus the actual cost of adapting and furnishing properties where necessary.
- A one off cash and clothing allowance for new arrivals of upto £200 per person paid in advance of receipt of mainstream benefits.
- £600 per head for primary care costs plus first year secondary health costs, including any specialist services that are necessary.
- £4,500 per head for education costs for 5-18 year olds
- £2,250 per head for education costs for ages 3-5, plus any first year costs for specialist education costs incurred for the first year.
- The actual costs of providing one year's orientation support, including provision of English for speakers of other languages.
- Local Authorities will be expected to work with DWP in supporting the refugees to access employment opportunities. However, there is no information of work that has been carried out at a departmental level to ensure that DWP are able to respond and contribute to the effective resettlement of Syrian Refugees.
- £12,000 of funding is available from the Overseas Development Aid budget on a per person basis, starting at £8,520 in year one, tapering to £1,000 in year five.

3.13 There will also be support for education and health in years 2-5, which will be funded separately to the Local Authority tariff. 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 above that would additional funding to administer an orientation programme of this kind.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 Consideration will need to be given to the Council's existing policies and what, if any, impact there may be. Initial consideration suggests the impact will be minimal given the small number of refugees who may be relocated in Halton (less than 100) and the Council's population (126,000).

5.0 **OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Central Government has outlined the level of funding to be made available to all participating Local Authorities to support the additional 20,000 Syrian refugees under the VPR programme. The LGA has confirmed the financial assistance available per person over a five year period.

5.2 The costs of providing asylum under Compass are met by the Government, as the asylum seekers do not have recourse to public funds prior to the immigration process being completed. There will however be resource implications if refugees are given a positive decision, whereby, Local Authorities will then have a statutory duty to assist.

6.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

6.1 All risks will be assessed and mitigated where possible. However, it is difficult to quantify, as the refugees will be by definition vulnerable, but their individual situation and needs are unknown. The complexity of support will need to be defined, and the capacity of the community needs assessed to determine the level of infrastructure support needed. However, many of the refugees are well educated, professionals and will positively contribute to the community.

7.0 **EQUALITY & DIVERSITY ISSUES**

7.1 Due regard will be given to the requirements of the Equality Act.

It will be important to be sensitive and all action taken will be proportionate.

8.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPRS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

None under the meaning of the Act.