

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & FAMILIES****DATE:** 22 JANUARY 2019**LEAD OFFICER:** DAVE HILL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LEARNING**SUBJECT:** COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP OF SYRIAN REFUGEES

COMMUNITY VISION People
OUTCOME:

SUMMARY OF ISSUE:

The Home Office has introduced a Community Sponsorship Scheme whereby local community groups can take responsibility to welcome and support refugees from Syria and the surrounding region directly into their communities. This complements resettlement work undertaken by local authorities as part of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS).

Surrey County Council and Surrey's Districts and Boroughs have been active participants in the Scheme since 2015. A local multi-faith group in Mole Valley has prepared an application to the Home Office for Community Sponsorship and seeks the Council's support in line with Home Office requirements.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that Community Sponsorship is encouraged and enabled as a means to resettle Syrian Refugees under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme and the Cabinet Member gives consent to prospective Community Sponsors in Mole Valley subject to them meeting the Home Office criteria for that consent (set out in paragraphs 8 and 9 of the report).

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

The resettlement of refugee households in Mole Valley adds to the diversity of the area and the household will have the opportunity in the long term to contribute to the local economy through employment and voluntary work. This results in a vibrant local economy with thriving towns and villages.

The VPRS and Community Sponsorship Scheme present opportunities to promote community spirit, to encourage individuals and families to welcome and support refugee households and to be more resilient in times of need.

DETAILS:

Background

1. The Home Secretary launched the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) in January 2014, and invited all local authorities in the UK to participate. A limited number of authorities joined and the first refugees arrived in the UK in March 2014.
2. In response to the conflict in Syria, the Prime Minister announced on 7 September 2015 a significant extension of the VPRS to resettle up to 20,000 individual refugees over five years and requested local authorities to assist.
3. Surrey was one of the first areas in the country to give its support. Working together, the County Council, Districts and Boroughs, Health, Faith and Voluntary Sectors have resettled over 200 refugee children and adults in Surrey under the VPRS. In Surrey, the Family Support Programme, operating in each District and Borough, has been commissioned to provide specialist services to meet the specific identified needs of refugee families through the scheme. These families are progressing well with improving English, children attending school, health needs being met and moving into voluntary and paid work.
4. Following the success of this scheme, the Home Office has introduced a Community Sponsorship Scheme whereby local community groups can take responsibility to welcome and support refugees from Syria and the surrounding region directly into their communities. It is a model that has been used in Canada since 1976 and has been piloted in Australia, Switzerland, Germany and Ireland and more recently in Italy, New Zealand and the UK. This complements resettlement work undertaken by local authorities as part of the VPRS.
5. A local multi-faith group in Mole Valley has prepared an application to the Home Office for Community Sponsorship, and seeks the Council's support in line with Home Office requirements. The prospective sponsor must obtain written evidence from the local authority that they consent to the approval of the application, and in Surrey's case both the County Council and District Council must provide consent. Mole Valley District Council considered this at its Cabinet meeting on 27 November 2018 and delegated authority to the Mole Valley District Council Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, to give consent. With the agreement of the Leader of Mole Valley District Council, the Council's Chief Executive gave consent to the group's application to be a Community Sponsor on 8 January 2019.
6. The Cabinet Member is asked to give consent to the group's application to be a Community Sponsor, subject to them meeting the Home Office criteria. The full criteria and responsibilities of Community Sponsors is set out in this report. Local authorities are not responsible for assessing applications and managing the community sponsorship process, as this lies with the Home Office.

Community Sponsorship Scheme – Criteria and Responsibilities

7. The Home Office is encouraging Community Sponsorship in response to the desire from civil society to play a greater role in refugee resettlement. Community Sponsorship enables local community groups to take responsibility to welcome and support refugees directly into their communities and complements resettlement work already undertaken by local authorities.

8. To become a community sponsor groups must:
 - be a registered charity or Community Interest Company;
 - have secured suitable affordable accommodation for two years;
 - have at least £9,000;
 - have consent from the local authority that their application is approved in principle; and
 - apply to the Home Office for their application to be approved.
9. Under the scheme a community sponsor is responsible for:
 - finding a property that will be available for two years;
 - providing resettlement support for one year;
 - meeting a household at the airport;
 - providing a warm welcome and cultural orientation;
 - supporting access to medical, social, welfare, and education services
 - English language tuition; and
 - Support towards volunteering, employment, self-sufficiency, independence and safeguarding support.
10. At the end of the first year responsibility for resettlement transfers to the local authority, in this instance, Mole Valley District Council. Community Sponsors do not receive Home Office funding, though it remains available in the first year for the Clinical Commissioning Groups and schools to cover health needs and school places. The Home Office will review progress of the household at the end of the first year and will provide the local authority, in this case Mole Valley District Council, with funding for the support if needed for years two to five. In many cases the Community Sponsor will remain on a voluntary basis in a supporting role with the household.
11. The prospective Community Sponsor has confirmed the suitability of their Safeguarding Policy with lead officers at Surrey's Safeguarding Boards for both Children and Adults. The prospective Community Sponsor has also made contact with local schools in regards to available school places and Surrey County Council officers have confirmed that places are likely to be available.

CONSULTATION:

12. There has been no external public consultation on this report.
13. The Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member for All-Age Learning, Cabinet Member for Community Services, and the Surrey County Councillor for Ashtead were internally consulted on the recommendation of this report.

14. This recommendation has been externally consulted with the Mole Valley District Council Strategic Housing Manager and the Head of Partnership at South East Strategic Partnership for Migration.

RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:

15. If the Cabinet Member approves the recommendation, this carries a degree of risk in terms of reputation if the Cabinet Member gives consent to an application from a Community Sponsor that is then refused by the Home Office. To mitigate this risk, the Council's role has ensured that the Community Sponsor undertook rigorous checks as part of their safeguarding responsibilities as well as checking the availability of school places.
16. In addition, the Mole Valley District Council Strategic Housing Manager has worked closely with the prospective Community Sponsor to ensure the group fully understands and is able to meet its responsibilities.
17. If the Cabinet Member does not approve the recommendations and wants further work done, the key risk will be to delay the progress of the Community Sponsorship application that the group has developed for the Home Office.

Financial and Value for Money Implications

18. Financial assistance is provided in the form of grant assistance by the Home Office. Effectively the VPRS is cost neutral and the County Council bears no direct cost for the VPRS.

Section 151 Officer Commentary

19. There is no short term financial implication to the Council from the VPRS scheme, as grant funding will be received in first year. There is also potential for Home Office support from years two to five that will alleviate any short to medium term funding pressures on the Council. Beyond this however, the financial implication for the Council is difficult to ascertain as this will depend on public services required by resettled families and the number of clients requiring one form of support or other.

Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer

20. The Council will need to consider providing consent to the community sponsor at two stages of their application. The first stage is to consent that the group can operate as a community sponsor in the area. The second stage is to agree that the group can accept the refugee family, once the Home Office has approved the group.
21. There will be a legal duty to assess and provide support in respect to any special educational needs, and any adult and children social care needs. There will also be a legal duty to provide school places to children of compulsory school age.
22. Further guidance can be found in the HM Government Community Sponsorship, Guidance for Local Authorities leaflet, as attached.

Equalities and Diversity

23. The Equalities Impact Assessment identifies positive impacts. The VPRS is specifically for the most vulnerable refugees from Syria, including refugee women who are at risk and survivors of violence, children, older and disabled people and those with medical needs. It aims to protect refugees at risk due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. The Neighbourhood Police are notified of households that are resettled and should any negative incidents occur they will be notified along with the Surrey Prevent Team.

Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children implications

24. There are no implications for corporate parenting/looked after children.

Safeguarding responsibilities for vulnerable children and adults implications:

25. The Home Office undertakes strenuous security and safeguarding checks on households before they are put forward for resettlement. In addition, the prospective Community Sponsor has confirmed the suitability of their Safeguarding Policy with lead officers at Surrey's Safeguarding Boards for both Children and Adults.

Environmental sustainability implications

26. There are no implications for climate change or carbon emissions.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

27. If the recommendations in this paper are approved the Cabinet Member on behalf of Surrey County Council will write to the Home Office confirming that consent to the Mole Valley Community Sponsor has been given by Surrey County Council.

Contact Officer:

- Mary Burguieres, Assistant Director, Systems and Transformation - 020 8541 9613

Consulted:

- Internal:
Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member for All-Age Learning, Cabinet Member for Community Services, Surrey County Councillor for Ashted
- External:
Mole Valley District Council Strategic Housing Manager, Head of Partnership at South East Strategic Partnership for Migration

Sources/background papers:

- Surrey Syrian VPRS Board – resettlement statistics September 2018
- Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) Guidance for local authorities and partners - Home Office July 2017
- Community Sponsorship Guidance for Prospective Sponsors - Home Office July 2017
- Community Sponsorship Guidance for Local Authorities - Home Office 2017

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