



**Report To:** Scrutiny and Overview Committee  
**Lead Officer:** Head of Housing Advice and Options

21 March 2019

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## Request to assist with the resettlement of Syrian Refugees

### Purpose

1. To seek approval to enter into a joint pledge to resettle three to five families via the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and the Resettlement of Vulnerable Children Scheme.
2. This is a key decision because it is significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards or electoral divisions in the area of the relevant local authority.

### Recommendations

3. Scrutiny and Overview Committee are asked to agree the following:
  - a) To review the proposal to enter into a joint pledge with Cambridge City to resettle between three and five refugee families and to identify any aspects that the committee require further clarification on.
  - b) To recommend that Cabinet approves the adoption of a joint pledge, subject to sufficient clarification of any identified queries.

### Reasons for Recommendations

4. The Council has publicly expressed its intention to provide a humanitarian response to people who are displaced from their home country; the recent consultation on the Council's 2019-24 Business Plan stated the intention to work with national, regional and local partners to support the needs of refugees and asylum seekers. No negative responses were received in relation to this commitment.
5. This paper sets out a proposal for the Council to take forward its commitment by entering into a joint pledge with Cambridge City Council to assist in resettling Refugees through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme and The Resettlement of Vulnerable Children Scheme (this scheme is for vulnerable children who are accompanied by parents or carers) which may include people from Syria, Iran or Sudan. The proposal is supported by the Local Government Association's Strategic Migration Partnership in conjunction with the Home Office who have asked that the Council commits to resettling a minimum of three families via the two schemes.

### Background Information

6. The VPRS is a long term project which started in 2015 and will run to 2023. has helped those in the greatest need, including people requiring urgent medical treatment, survivors of violence and torture and women and children at risk. UK

local authorities volunteer to participate in the Schemes and undertake to find suitable accommodation and provide integration support to refugees. This includes meeting refugees on their arrival in the UK and settling them into the local area, helping with registration for welfare support and relevant services. There is a detailed action plan in place for each family to ensure delivery of the scheme.

7. The VPRS is due to close in early 2020 and offers of accommodation to the scheme will need to be received by December 2019. This means the opportunity for the Council to assist with resettlement work is time limited.
8. In addition, Cambridge City Council assists people via the Resettlement of Vulnerable Children scheme. Both schemes have the same requirements around housing and support and the same grants attached. The difference is the first resettles Syrian refugee families and the second resettles on the basis of the vulnerability of the children, who are accompanied by parents or carers and who may be from Syria, Iran or Sudan.
9. A joint pledge to assist the scheme would involve collaboration with Cambridge City who recently surpassed their target to resettle over a hundred refugees through the programs and who already have a dedicated resettlement team in place including two Arabic speaking support workers.
10. The agreement would require South Cambridgeshire District Council to source the accommodation whilst the support requirements would be fulfilled by the existing resettlement team employed by the City Council.
11. In the event that a joint pledge is agreed, Cambridge City colleagues have indicated that they intend to employ an additional Support Worker. In order for this to be financially viable, a minimum of fifteen people will need to be resettled (funding is attached to each person and not per family). Depending on levels of need, a new Support Worker could support up to twenty five people. This is expected to equate to between three and five families, depending on household size. Due to the fact that it is not possible to predict the exact size of any family and also due to the limited time left for the VPRS to run, it is recommended that the pledge retains some flexibility in the number of people and households it includes based on the numbers outlined above.

## **Considerations**

### **Impact on levels of housing need**

12. When the scheme was first introduced nationally, there were early concerns about the impact that joining might have on local communities. In particular concern was expressed that an influx in new families entering the district would displace existing families on the housing register.
13. Despite the early concerns in relation to the Housing Register, there is no requirement for the accommodation provided to be in the form of social housing. Nonetheless, due to the high private rents in the area, the fact that rents will be paid via Universal Credit and the need for refugee families to be provided with as much stability as possible, it is anticipated that the majority of accommodation offered will be taken from social housing stock.

14. In terms of the impact on the Housing Register, the Council will be able to decide which housing it offers to the program and would therefore ensure that its decisions had the least impact on existing levels of need within the district. Based on the existing stock profile and levels of need, it is suggested that offers of three bedroom houses are most appropriate (this is the house type that has the least demand associated with it).
15. In terms of the impact this has, as an indication, two hundred and eighty three properties with three bedrooms were let to households on the Housing Register in the financial year 2017/18. In the event that the maximum amount of five properties were sourced via social housing stock, this would represent 1.76% of all social housing allocations for three bedroom properties in the district during a typical year.
16. It also should be noted that, of the two hundred and eighty three properties allocated last year, not all of these will have been let to households in Band A . At the end of March 2018, there were fifteen households in Band A requiring a three bedroom house. Thus, taken together, these factors suggest that the Council can continue to meet its duties to local households experiencing the greatest level of need whilst also providing a humanitarian response to families via the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement scheme.

### **Community Integration**

17. The rural nature of the district will present challenges in terms of accessing support and local amenities. Careful consideration will need to be given to the location of any properties offered to the scheme to ensure that integration into the local community is as cohesive as possible. The Home Office will only accept properties that it considers suitable. Suitable locations are likely to be in our largest villages. Good public transport links to Cambridge City will need to be available as refugees will not be allowed a driving licence initially and the Support Workers will not want to travel too extensively across the district in order to maximise the support time.
18. Anecdotally, Cambridge City colleagues have indicated that local communities have tended to be welcoming towards refugee families and that offers of support from voluntary, religious and charitable organisations have been forthcoming.
19. A crucial aspect of the role of the Support Worker will be to liaise with the local education authority prior to the arrival of a family to ensure school places are available. They will also work closely with benefit departments to ensure that the correct welfare benefits are in place as well as helping families to access other local community groups and services.

### **Implications**

20. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk management, equality and diversity, climate change, community safety and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered: -

#### ***Financial***

21. Funding is attached to each person who is resettled. Given the extensive support requirements associated in integrating and supporting households, it is envisaged that the funding attached to the pledge will be retained by Cambridge City Council.

22. There will inevitably be an element officer time associated with this Council's role in sourcing accommodation. However, this is likely to be relatively minor and, in view of the small number of properties pledged, it is likely to be counter productive to consider a cross-charge mechanism for these. The cost of the accommodation itself will be covered via the welfare benefit system (dependent on rent levels). The financial implications to the Council are therefore indirect in terms of officer time and are expected to be limited in nature.

***Legal***

23. The Council have statutory obligations towards homeless households as set out in the Housing Act 1996. These duties have recently increased with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The expected impact on social housing stock is not expected to prevent the Council from meeting its statutory duties in this respect.
24. In terms of formalising any agreement between Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire District Council, it is expected that a straight forward Service Level Agreement can be drawn up setting out the responsibilities and roles of each party.

***Staffing***

25. There is expected to be a small impact on officer time in terms of sourcing three to five units of accommodation but this is negligible in relation to the work that will be undertaken by Cambridge City staff and which will require the recruitment of an additional support worker. However, this can be financed via the funding attached to the resettlement of each person.

***Risk Management***

26. Although it is not possible to entirely remove the risks associated with a new venture, the proposals set out in this paper minimise the risks by agreeing to small, manageable pledge with an established support provider.

**Background Papers: None**

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