

REPORT TO: Cabinet 7 December 2020

LEAD CABINET MEMBER: Councillor Hazel Smith, Lead Member for Housing

LEAD OFFICER: Peter Campbell – Head of Housing Services

Refugee Support

Executive Summary

1. The purpose of this report is to update members on the Council's commitment to assist refugees, and to determine our future offer.
2. The report also calls for clarity from Government regarding future funding and expectation in respect of refugees.

Key Decision

3. No.

Recommendations

4. It is recommended that:
 - i. Cabinet make a commitment to accept up to 4 refugee families per year within the District as part of the national commitment for the next three years, subject to
 - a. Government providing ongoing funding and developing future schemes, and
 - b. having access to support services that are currently offered by Cambridge City Council or equivalent.
 - ii. the Lead Member for Housing is able to change this timescale if this brings the timescale into line with the announcement of a future government scheme.

Reasons for Recommendations

5. To ensure that the Council can meet our part of the international commitment to assisting refugees.

Details

6. In April 2019 Cabinet considered a report seeking its approval of entering a joint pledge to resettle three to five families via the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and the Resettlement of Vulnerable Children Scheme.
7. As part of this commitment the Council agreed to offer accommodation for between three and five families within the District. This was offered in conjunction with Cambridge City Council who provided support to the refugees and reflected the Councils 'share' of the 20,000 people who the Government had pledged to assist as part of the SVPRS (Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme). The Government's scheme was itself part of a United Nations project to aid refugees in Syria and surrounding countries and is distinct from other refugee services that focus on people already within the UK.
8. The Council were on target to meet this commitment and had been able to successfully settle 4 families (15 individuals) within the District. However, one of the families chose to relocate within the UK to be closer to their extended support network.
9. The fifth family were scheduled to arrive in around March 2020. However due to a family illness they were unable fly and therefore could not take up the offer.
10. Shortly afterwards the British Government, as part of the response to Covid-19, took the decision to halt the SVPRS and there have been no further refugees since then.
11. The SVPRS was a time limited project that was due to end in 2020. The Government had mooted that the scheme would be incorporated with other schemes for refugees and relaunched during 2020. On 11th November 2020 the Government announced a one-year extension to the scheme with longer term plans being subject to the Government's Spending Review.

Options

12. The Council should consider if it would wish to continue to commit to participating in any future national scheme for refugees. If any new scheme reflects funding available under the SVPRS the Council could commit to helping up to 4 families per year (around 16 individuals). It is considered that this is an appropriate contribution to the national 'ask' but is a number that remains manageable. Any offer of accommodation would be subject to the continuing partnership arrangements with Cambridge City Council to provide the ongoing support required and the availability of longer-term funding from Government being equivalent to the funding offered under the SVPRS. This is the recommended option.
13. An alternative option is not to continue with supporting a future refugee scheme. This option is not recommended as this would be damaging to the reputation of the Council and go against our values of being a caring council.

Implications

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

Financial

15. Assuming that the Government offers continued funding there are no additional financial consequences for adopting this approach.

Legal

16. There are no additional legal considerations relating to this Strategy.

Staffing

17. No additional staffing proposed in this Strategy.

Equality and Diversity

18. An equality impact assessment has been carried out and no specific impacts on any protected groups have been found. It is likely that participation within a refugee scheme would have a positive impact on some ethnic groups within the area.

Alignment with Council Priority Areas

Housing that is truly affordable for everyone to live in

By supporting refugees to settle in our District, we are ensuring that the most vulnerable households in society are able to live in a decent affordable home,

Background Papers

Previous cabinet report April 2019 can be accessed at-
<http://moderngov.ie/ListDocuments.aspx?CId=293&MID=7366#AI76651>

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