

Report to: **Executive**

Date: **16 June 2016**

Title: **Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme**

Portfolio Area: **Cllr Tucker**

Wards Affected: **All**

Relevant Scrutiny Committee: **Overview & Scrutiny**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Date next steps can be taken:  
(e.g. referral on of recommendation or implementation of substantive decision)

Author: **Isabel Blake** Role: **Community of Practice Lead Housing, Revenues & Benefits**

Contact: **01822 813551/Isabel.Blake@swdevon.gov.uk**

---

**Recommendations:**

**To Recommend to Council:**

1. To agree to participate in the national Syrian Vulnerable Person's Relocation Scheme (SVPRS)
2. To agree to use the existing Private Sector Lease Scheme & the existing Council Direct Lets Scheme to be used for purposes of resettlement in accordance with the SVPRS
3. That any specific details of the scheme are delegated to the Community of Practice Lead for Housing, Revenues & Benefits, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Customer First Portfolio Holder

## **1. Executive summary**

- 1.1 This report proposes that the Council formally support the Government's response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis and seek to resettle up to 6 households in the South Hams District.
- 1.2 The Government has invited Local Authorities to participate in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme – This is a voluntary scheme and is not currently mandatory.
- 1.3 This report also recommends that 2 existing housing schemes (Private Sector Lease Scheme & Direct Lets Scheme) could provide a cost neutral way of offering accommodation for the purpose of the SVPRS and it is proposed that this is the South Hams response.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1.1 As a response to the worsening humanitarian crisis in Syria, the Prime Minister announced on the 7<sup>th</sup> September 2015 that the U.K would resettle up to 20,000 Syrian Refugees over the life of the Parliament. Refugees would be offered resettlement from the camps in and around Syria and in addition to Syrians, people would also be accepted from The Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan. This was an extension to the scheme already in existence known as the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS)
- 2.2 The scheme prioritised applications from the following people
  - Women & children at risk
  - Victims of Torture
  - People in high medical need.
- 2.3 There is a robust screening criteria prior to acceptance on the scheme by both The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and The Home Office This includes the taking of biometrics, documentary evidence and interviews. Security is regarded as a continual process and will continue after arrival.
- 2.4 Refugees who enter the UK under this scheme, do so under a 5 year humanitarian protection visa. This will allow them 5 years leave to remain before they can either claim asylum or return to rebuild their country. It also entitles them to benefit (including housing benefit) and the right to work.
- 2.5 A local authority which asks to participate in the scheme has cases passed to them by the Home Office. The referral gives detail on the family makeup, age and specific needs. The local authority is asked to confirm whether it can accommodate and support those specific cases. In two tier Devon this is a conversation which will take place in conjunction with the County Council. On accepting a case, local authorities need to arrange housing, school places etc. In parallel, an arrival date will be agreed. The government provides funding to cover the local costs of housing in receiving the groups arriving. The Home Office has indicated it will seek to ensure an equitable contribution of refugees across the country so no individual local

authorities bare a disproportion share of the burden. It is made clear to refugees before they arrive that they could be resettled anywhere in the UK as part of this programme. It is also made clear the refugees will be allocated accommodation of the same standard as that available to UK citizens. As previously mentioned, local authorities can choose whether to participate in this scheme. The scheme will continue to run alongside resettlement schemes and other asylum procedures.

- 2.6 In Devon there have been ongoing conversations about how best to respond locally which have involved both the Districts, The County, the NHS & the Police. As a District our role would be around sourcing and offering accommodation and assisting with claims for housing benefit, however, given the people who are prioritised for the scheme it is imperative that access to Education, Social Care and Healthcare are considered alongside any offer of accommodation. It is important to also note the importance of public support and the voluntary sector who will have a role to play in the resettlement of refugees locally. This needs careful coordination to ensure offers of accommodation are considered in the round.
- 2.7 The Government has now confirmed funding for the first 5 years (Appendix 1) so there will be no direct cost to the Local Authority.
- 2.8 South Hams, as part of its ongoing commitment to tackling homelessness in the District has 2 existing housing schemes which can be utilised for the SVPRS. These are the Private Sector Lease Scheme & the Direct Lets model.
- 2.9 **Private Sector Lease Scheme**  
This Council currently leases 8 properties from private Landlords as an alternative to B&B accommodation.  
Due to successes in our homeless prevention these properties are not continually in use so would lend themselves well to be used for this purpose. As the properties are managed by SHDC and have been vetted to a high standard, officers will be able to continually support households with integration in the local area.
- 2.10 **Direct Lets Scheme**  
This Council currently operates a successful letting agency model with a portfolio of 47 properties it manages on behalf of private landlords. Originally set up as a response to the difficulty with renting privately in the South Hams and an effective way of preventing homelessness. It is envisaged that Landlords who wish to offer their properties for the purpose of resettling refugees are given practical support by the Council acting as a managing agent.
- 2.11 Both these schemes would ensure that refugees were offered stable homes without the conflicting use of social housing for people on the housing register. It would also support Landlords who are

mind to offer housing assistance to refugees on a cost neutral basis to SHDC.

- 2.12 Both models operate within the parameters of Local Housing Allowance (some rent is recouped through housing benefit subsidy on the private sector lease properties) so rent would be affordable. This is especially pertinent in Totnes where there is large public support for welcoming refugees, but property is predominantly above the level set by Local Housing Allowance.

### **3. Outcomes/outputs**

- 3.1 If 6 families were accommodated by South Hams District Council, the size of the proposed family groupings could mean the council would be helping to provide safe sanctuary for 30 people.
- 3.2 An unintentional consequence could be that more property could become available for the Council to use for homeless households, preventing long stays in temporary accommodation.

### **4. Options available and consideration of risk**

- 4.1 SHDC does not have to participate in the SVPRS which is entirely on a voluntary basis.
- 4.2 There is widespread public support for assisting in the resettlement of refugees in the South Hams District, and particularly in and around Totnes.
- 4.3 Anticipated financial costs will be covered by central government funding, in line with the government's commitment (Year 1 is funded from the overseas aid budget and funding has now been confirmed for years 2-5)
- 4.4 Any refugee resettled in the South Hams, may choose to leave quickly and go elsewhere in the UK. This may mean that there are periods of void rentals to cover. These will be covered by the Government, and if appropriate the property may be able to be used by the housing advice service to prevent homelessness.

### **5. Proposed Way Forward**

- 5.1 That the Executive formally recommend to Council that South Hams voluntarily participate in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme
- 5.2 That the Executive formally recommend to Council to approve use of the Direct Lets & Private Sector Lease Schemes for use under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme.

### **6. Implications**

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance	Y	The scheme is currently voluntary. If agreed that the PSL & Direct Lets Scheme can be used for the SVPRS, it does not require a change to policy as we will be accommodating under our powers to prevent homelessness under the Homelessness Act 2002.
Financial	Y	The Government has provided funding for the scheme which will cover void periods for vacant properties. It is also possible to claim the administration costs incurred from the funding made available from Government.
Risk	Y	There are some reputational risks in both participating in the scheme and choosing not to. It is important therefore when identifying potential offers of accommodation to submit to the Home Office that the police are fully engaged to ensure the suitability of the property for the purpose of resettling refugees.  There is also a risk that people offered resettlement in the South Hams do not remain. Although we will actively engage our voluntary sector to support people we must be prepared for some void periods. Having a flexible model will mean that we can revert back to use for homeless households if the need arises. However voids are covered by the funding.
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity	Y	By their definition the Syrian refugees will be vulnerable and it will be necessary to ensure close partnership working with both statutory and voluntary agencies to enable the appropriate services and support are offered.
Safeguarding	Y	See above. If SHDC choose to participate in the scheme there is a need to ensure only suitable persons are used in their support and care. There will also be a requirement to manage cases confidentially so refugees are able to build their new lives with an appropriate degree of anonymity if desired.

Community Safety, Crime and Disorder	Y	If we do try to place any refugees, we will work closely with our Community Safety Partnership to ensure wherever possible we are supportive and mindful of concerns in the community as well as supporting the people fleeing conflict.
Health, Safety and Wellbeing	Y	The Devon partnership working will ensure that the needs of individual households will be considered as part of the suitability of accommodation.
Other implications		

## **Supporting Information**

### **Appendices:**

Appendix 1 – Richard Harrington’s letter to Local Authorities outlining funding.

### **Background Papers:**

Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme – Statement of Requirements  
<http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/6869714/Syrian+VPR+Statement+of+requirements.pdf/8b2c4d78-57da-474e-a9ef-c61a56809bc9>

Syrian Vulnerable Person s Resettlement Programme – Guidance for Local Authorities and Partners  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/472020/Syrian\\_Resettlement\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_gov\\_uk.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/472020/Syrian_Resettlement_Fact_Sheet_gov_uk.pdf)

## **Approval and clearance of report**

<b>Process checklist</b>	<b>Completed</b>
Portfolio Holder briefed	<b>Yes/No</b>
SLT Rep briefed	<b>Yes/No</b>
Relevant Exec Director sign off (draft)	<b>Yes/No</b>
Data protection issues considered	<b>Yes/No</b>
If exempt information, public (part 1) report also drafted. (Cabinet/Scrutiny)	<b>Yes/No</b>