

Report to: **Hub Committee**
Date: **19 March 2019**
Title: **Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme Update**
Portfolio Area: **Heath & Wellbeing - Cllr Leech**
Wards Affected: **all**

Relevant Scrutiny Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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

Date next steps can be taken: After the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Call-in period. **27 March 2019**

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Recommendations:

That the Hub Committee:

- 1. note progress on West Devon Borough Council's pledge to voluntarily participate in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme**
- 2. Delegate Authority to the Head of Housing, Revenues and Benefits Practice, in consultation with the Lead Member for Health and Wellbeing, to extend the pledge to help Syrian Refugee Families in the circumstances set out in paragraph 5.1 of the presented report**

1. Executive summary

- 1) Members will recall that West Devon responded rapidly with a pledge to voluntarily participate in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme in December 2015. 4 families have since been accommodated by the Council in privately rented properties and supported by the West Devon Safe Haven charity group.
- 2) It is through this group that widespread community support in West Devon for the plight of refugees has been realised and the group has asked the Council to expand its pledge to take more refugees. This will be dependent on the group sourcing properties that can be then offered to the Home Office by the Council.

2. Background

- 1) West Devon pledged support for the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme in December 2015. This was in response to the Government commitment to resettle 20,000 people from the camps in and around Syria. (As well as Syria refugees included in the scheme included people from The Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan.)
- 2) The Government had prioritised certain groups of people. These were
 - Women & children at risk
 - Victims of torture
 - People with a high medical need.
- 3) West Devon & South Hams were the first 2 Councils in Devon to meet their pledge when in June 2018 the 4th family arrived. This followed properties volunteered by private landlords wanting to help following the public meeting organised by West Devon Safe Haven in February 2017. Although progress appeared to be slow, there was a significant time lapse between an offer being made to the Home Office and a family firstly being identified and then suitable travelling arrangements made. It was also important to stagger arrivals so each family could receive the support necessary to integrate and settle in their new communities.
- 4) Whilst the Council was responsible for sourcing accommodation, the Devon County Council has held the lead role in coordinating the Districts, the County the NHS, Devon & Cornwall Police and the community & voluntary sector to manage the programme and Government funding. A report delivered by the Project Lead for the Devon Local Government Steering Group on the 26th October can be found at appendix 1.
- 5) West Devon Safe Haven have requested the Council consider extending its pledge to take more families, whilst having regard to local housing market conditions, if they are able to access properties that meet the requirements of the scheme. This would place no obligation on the Council to source additional properties but would not prevent further refugees coming to West Devon to resettle.

3. Outcomes/outputs

- 1) West Devon has already met its pledge to resettle 4 families. There is widespread public support and Safe Haven West Devon continues to have capacity and a willingness to assist with more families.

4. Options available and consideration of risk

- 1) West Devon has met its pledge to the resettlement scheme.
- 2) West Devon Safe Haven has expressed a desire to assist with further refugee families. Whilst Officers are supportive of their wishes and will offer property management support through the Council's in-house letting agency, there is not the capacity to proactively source property when the Council also has statutory duties towards housing homeless people. However if West Devon Safe Haven had landlords who wished only to make their properties available to help the plight of refugees then this would not interfere in the discharge of the Council's homeless functions and the two activities could operate alongside each other.
- 3) Whilst West Devon Safe Haven does not have any firm offers of accommodation currently, this report seeks approval that if any offer is forthcoming that they are not prevented from progressing because the Council has met its pledge.
- 4) West Devon Safe Haven could go down the route of Community Sponsorship, however this activity has mainly occurred in Districts where the Council has not acted. This is not the case in West Devon where the Council has not only acted but fulfilled its pledge and can continue to play its part regarding property management for any additional property deemed as suitable for refugees.

5. Proposed Way Forward

- 1) It is recommended that Hub agrees to extend the pledge made by West Devon Borough Council if and when appropriate suitable housing is offered to the Council via a private landlord specifically for rehousing refugees or that West Devon Safe Haven are successful in procuring offers for the same purpose.

6. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance	N	The scheme is voluntary and West Devon has fulfilled its pledge.
Financial	N	Money has been set aside from the Governments overseas aid budget. There is no financial implication on West Devon, other than officer time.
Risk		None
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity	Y	Considered as part of the original pledge
Safeguarding	Y	Considered as part of original pledge

Community Safety, Crime and Disorder	Y	As is the current case we will work closely with our Community Safety Partnership and Devon & Cornwall Police 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		
Other implications		

Supporting Information

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Report to Devon Local Government Steering Group of the 26th October 2018

Background Papers:

None