

Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 08 May 2018

Report Title: Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme and Community Sponsorship

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Liz Wardlaw, Health

Senior Officer: Mark Palethorpe – Acting Executive Director for People

1. Report Summary

- 1.1. To update members on the current position regarding the Governments Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and to consider support of Community Sponsorship within Cheshire East.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. Following consideration of this report, to agree to accept further refugee families, in addition to those under the Council's original pledge of 5 families, and indicate how many families Cabinet will be willing to accept under the Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme.
- 2.2. To agree to operate under the Community Sponsorship Programme within the Cheshire East area.
- 2.3. To agree in principle to support the application by Churches Together in Nantwich to the Home Office to become a Community Sponsor and apply for a refugee family to be housed in the south of the Borough and delegate authority to the Executive Director of People to provide written consent on behalf of the Council upon being satisfied that Churches Together in Nantwich meet the requirements.
- 2.4. That Cabinet delegate authority to the Executive Director of People to make decisions about supporting any future requests to become a community sponsor and (if so determined) to provide consent from the local authority for any such future community sponsorship requests.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1. Since the Government pledged in 2015 that the UK would accept up to 20,000 refugees by 2020 over a third of the refugees have now been

resettled with approximately half of those who have arrived under the scheme being children.

- 3.2. The Home Office published their latest migration statistics on 30th November 2017, which relate to the period ending September 2017. It reports that since the scheme began in 2014 the UK has resettled a total of 9,394 people. In the year ending September 2017, 4,980 people were resettled under the VPRS across 229 different local authorities.
- 3.3. In this publication it reports that the North West had resettled 669 people across 19 authorities from the start of the scheme to the end of September 2017. Since this date the North West has resettled a further 131 people giving a total to date of 800 people resettled across 21 authorities. Cheshire East Council fulfilled its pledge of taking up to 5 families over the lifetime of the programme by accepting all 5 families in 2017.
- 3.4. The 5 refugee families that have been resettled in Cheshire East have settled well into their new communities with children achieving well at school. Initial health and dentistry problems have been addressed and 2 adults have now taken on volunteering opportunities in order to build up their work experience with the aim of gaining paid employment. It is important that language is considered when supporting the resettlement.
- 3.5. The support work for the 5 families has been achieved through a service level agreement with the Council's Care4CE Team and a contract with Refugees Welcome, a registered charity set up specifically to help these, and other refugee families. An internal officer group and a multi-agency group has monitored the progress of the programme and any issues arising from it. There has been a lot of learning from the programme and some good practice and both the Council's Care4CE Team and Refugees Welcome are in a good position to accept any additional families within the Borough.
- 3.6. The Government is continuing to work with local authorities to ensure placements are available as more vulnerable people arrive. As such Cheshire East Council has been asked to consider taking more families, in addition to the 5 families in the original pledge, for which additional funding is available for each family received.
- 3.7. The first 12 months of a refugee's resettlement costs are fully funded by central government at a rate of £8,520 per family member. Years 2 to 5 are tapered at a rate of £5,000 for months 13-24, £3,700 for months 25-36, £2,300 for months 37-48 months and £1,000 for months 49-60. There is more flexibility on using the funding in years 2 to 5 to support refugees.
- 3.8. The Home Office has acknowledged the difficulties some local authorities have had in finding appropriately sized accommodation and have proposed that local authorities could let the Home Office know when housing actually becomes available and a refugee family will be matched with the house

and brought to the UK on a regular flight rather than a chartered flight. This will give more flexibility to the local authority and not tie the authority to a chartered flight currently set at 4 times per year.

- 3.9. Due to the lack of larger sized homes available within Cheshire East, that are affordable to refugee families, the Home Office will also look at matching smaller sized families to the Cheshire East area to meet the accommodation available.
- 3.10. Another way in which local authority areas can support vulnerable people to resettle in the UK is through Community Sponsorship. Community Sponsorship is a ground-breaking development for the resettlement of refugee families in the UK, through the Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme. It enables community groups to become directly involved in supporting the resettlement of refugees fleeing conflict and in need of protection in the UK. It encourages innovation in resettlement that has the potential to promote positive resettlement outcomes, both for the resettled families and local communities.
- 3.11. Community sponsors must be local registered charities or community interest companies and are responsible for all elements of resettling the family. This includes providing accommodation, meeting the family at the airport, providing a welcome and cultural orientation, providing English language tuition, supporting access to medical and social services and support towards gaining employment. Community sponsors must also provide at least £9,000 in funding to meet some of the financial needs of the resettled family and a detailed and credible plan to illustrate how they will deliver effective resettlement support to a resettled family.
- 3.12. Community sponsors need to be approved as a sponsor through an application process, which will be assessed by the Home Office. Community sponsors also require written consent of the local authority in the area where the resettled family will live. Typically the consent will be provided by the Chief Executive Officer, Director or Councillor with the authority to consent on behalf of the local authority. The Home Office guidance state the grounds on which a local authority might object as:
 - 3.12.1. insufficient capacity to provide certain crucial local services in the proposed housing area (e.g. lack of school places);
 - 3.12.2. concerns about community tensions in the proposed housing area;
 - 3.12.3. where they have reason to believe that the organisation is not suitable to undertake the resettlement of vulnerable adults and children; or
 - 3.12.4. another appropriate reason.
- 3.13. If a community sponsor meets all of the criteria they will be approved by the Home Office and will be allocated a family. This family will not normally

have complex needs so as to make the process as straightforward as possible for the community group. The community sponsor approval will be reviewed by the Home Office after six months and if they have not been allocated a resettled family within this time they may be asked to submit a new application. The approval process is summarised below:

- 3.13.1. Local authority gives consent to a prospective sponsor to operate as community sponsor in that area
 - 3.13.2. Prospective sponsor submits application to the Home Office for approval as a community sponsor
 - 3.13.3. Application considered against criteria for approval
 - 3.13.4. Approval granted
 - 3.13.5. Agreement with sponsor signed
 - 3.13.6. Family to be resettled proposed for allocation to sponsor
 - 3.13.7. Sponsor and local authority consider and jointly agree allocation
 - 3.13.8. Resettled family arrives (typically six weeks after allocation is agreed)
- 3.14. Cheshire East Council has been approached by Churches Together in Nantwich as a potential community sponsor. They have already secured a property that belongs to a local church and had agreement from the local schools that they will support refugee children. They have secured a large amount of funding and have a number of volunteers in place. They have a draft resettlement plan and have now become part of Refugees Welcome, with two trustees on their board and will benefit from their experience and policies and procedures that are already in place.
- 3.15. Before Churches Together in Nantwich move further forward with their application to the Home Office they wish to obtain the necessary written consent from the Council to operate as a community sponsor in the Cheshire East area.
- 3.16. We have also been approached by a group in Sandbach who also wish to become community sponsors and will soon be submitting their resettlement plan and asking for consent. As community sponsorship is becoming more popular across the whole country, following success of the scheme which originated in Canada, Cheshire East Council may receive more requests for consent from potential community sponsors.
- 3.17. The Executive Director of People has already been given delegated authority to work both sub-regionally and with the Home Office for decisions relating to the delivery of the Asylum Seeker Dispersal Programme, Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children Programme, therefore delegating authority for the Community Sponsorship requests to the

Executive Director of People would naturally sit alongside current decision making routes.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1. The Council has fulfilled its pledge of accepting 5 families over the lifetime of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme so could choose to not take any more families, however the numbers accepted in the Cheshire East area are low in comparison to neighbouring authorities and the Home Office is asking for support from more local authorities to meet the commitment for the UK.
- 4.2. The Council could choose to not become a community sponsorship area but this would restrict the support that the community could provide to refugee families. Operating under community sponsorship reduces the capacity required from the Council as all responsibility for supporting the resettled family is taken by the community sponsor.
- 4.3. As a community sponsor has already identified themselves if the Council cannot provide a valid reason to refuse the request but does not provide consent there is a reputational risk if the community sponsor were to speak publicly about the refusal.

5. Background

- 5.1. The UK government are taking part in the United Nations programme to resettle refugees who have fled their home countries, including those affected by conflict or civil war. In 2015 the Prime Minister announced that the UK would accept an additional 20,000 Syrian refugees over the course of the current UK parliament under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme.
- 5.2. The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme has now been extended to include other nationalities caught up in the crisis such as Iraqi, Palestinian and Kurdish minorities who sought refuge in Syria before the conflict but have had to flee again.
- 5.3. In November 2015 Cabinet received their first report on the Council's position on support for Syrian refugees and asylum seekers. At this meeting it was agreed that the Council would welcome an appropriate number of Syrian refugees to Cheshire East. Cabinet also agreed to inform the Government of the Council's commitment to supporting Syrian refugees and the conversation with the Home Office began.
- 5.4. The Council went on to work with partner authorities to establish a robust operational mechanism to oversee the scheme in the sub region.
- 5.5. The Council also worked with the voluntary sector and a charity called Refugees Welcome was formed to support the programme within the Cheshire East area. Refugees Welcome are currently working with the 5

families housed in Cheshire East and have had their contract extended into year 2 to continue their support.

- 5.6. In March 2016 Cabinet received an update on work that had taken place so far, this included the continuation of the sub-regional work to agree a coordinated approach across the region and to plan for and collectively deliver the SVPR and Compass programme once the financial implications were known. Cabinet also agreed to support a maximum of 3 unaccompanied children, working in partnership with Kent County Council to achieve this.
- 5.7. In September 2016 Cabinet agreed to accept a maximum of 3-5 families across the lifetime of the programme which was fulfilled during 2017 with the first refugee family arriving in January, the second in March and three further families in April 2017. There are 10 adults and 18 children in total and all families have been housed in the north of the Borough.

6. Wards Affected and Local Ward Members

- 6.1. It is intended to house a family through community sponsorship in the Nantwich South and Stapeley ward therefore the following ward members have been consulted:
 - Nantwich South and Stapeley – Cllrs Peter Groves and Andrew Martin
 - Nantwich North and West ward – Cllrs Penny Butterill and Arthur Moran

7. Implications of Recommendation

7.1. Policy Implications

- 7.1.1. There are no immediate policy implications for consideration.

7.2. Legal Implications

- 7.2.1. In order to support the VPR scheme and provide services to refugees the Council entered into a contract with Refugee Welcome which has been extended in accordance with the terms of that contract and will end on 2 January 2019
- 7.2.2. If the VPR scheme is continued beyond the term of the current contract (and the Service Level Agreement with Care4Ce) then consideration will need to be given to the scope for extending current arrangements/the entering into a new contract. The Service will liaise with Legal Services and Procurement officers to ensure that arrangements comply with the EU Regulations and the Council's own contract procurement rules (and revisit the agreement it has with Care4Ce).

7.2.3. The legal implications were reported to Cabinet 13 September 2016, setting out in full the Council's powers and duties in relation to the SVPR programme. There are no further immediate legal implications for consideration at this stage.

7.3. Financial Implications

7.3.1. For community sponsorship the support for the refugee families would be met by the community sponsor, however there is a potential impact on the Council through the payment of benefits. The Benefits Cap is also affecting some refugee families resulting in a need for the families to pay the majority of their own housing rental costs, and they could apply to be considered for a Discretionary Housing Payment. In addition, many families have been placed in larger accommodation falling under higher Council Tax bands. This results in a large shortfall between the Council Tax liability and the maximum Council Tax Support provided under the Council's scheme for those of working age. Any shortfall in costs would need to be met by the community sponsors.

7.3.2. There is a risk highlighted in section 8.2 that the community sponsor may not maintain their support for the resettled family and the responsibility for the family would then be transferred to the Council. If this was to happen the Home Office would then provide funding through the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme as per the existing funding agreement.

7.3.3. If additional families are taken on in the Borough through the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme then there will be no financial implications for the existing council resources as the programme will be fully funded by the Home Office VPR grant as set out in section 3.5 of this report.

7.4. Equality Implications

7.4.1. An Equality Impact Assessment is in place and is reviewed by the multi agency group. This provides an active assessment to ensure we consider any unintended consequences for specific characteristic groups through the delivery of these humanitarian programmes.

7.5. Rural Community Implications

7.5.1. From our work to date it is seen as important that families have access to good infrastructure services and transport routes to enable families who may need, or want, to travel readily to other areas to connect with other family members or friends, to access a Mosque and specialist food suppliers. Therefore the larger towns have been favoured above rural areas to house refugee families.

7.6. Human Resources Implications

7.6.1. The VPR programme delivery is highly dependant on officer time which affects council areas such as public health and communities, housing, children and families, Care4CE, procurement, legal, media and communications and financial services. Should additional families be accepted then these areas of the Council will support the programme under existing arrangements.

7.7. Health and Wellbeing Implications

7.7.1. The delivery of supporting refugee families within the Borough would have no specific adverse health implications for our population.

7.8. Implications for Children and Young People

7.8.1. The children from within the 5 families now housed in the Borough have accessed education, nursery and child care services as needed and are performing well within their chosen schools and colleges.

7.8.2. Any children accepted through community sponsorship will be able to access schools close to their intended new home.

7.8.3. There are supportive plans in place to ensure these vulnerable children receive support as needed as a result of their refugee status.

7.9. Overview and Scrutiny Committee Implications

7.9.1. There are no immediate overview and scrutiny implications for consideration.

7.10. Other Implications (Please Specify)

7.10.1. There are no other implications for consideration.

8. Risk Management

8.1. If the Council were to refuse the application from any potential community sponsors there is a reputational risk that the community would see this as the Council not supporting vulnerable families.

8.2. There is a risk that the community sponsor may not maintain their support for the resettled family and the responsibility for the family would then be transferred to the Council. If this was to happen the Home Office would then provide funding through the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme.

8.3. The property identified for the Nantwich family is owned by Market Street Church and is stated as being available currently and for the foreseeable

future. However if this should change the responsibility to find a suitable home would rest with the local authority.

- 8.4. There is a risk that families will be subject to a benefits cap and responsible for payment of their own rent charges. As most of the properties used to house the families have been from within the faith sector and quite large houses, with high council tax bands, the rent has been higher than that of a social landlord and difficult for families to afford. If this was the case then the community sponsor would either have to meet the costs of the rent from their fundraising or find an alternative affordable home.
- 8.5. The Home Office recommends community sponsors have at least £9,000 in funding, however experience to date suggests that the required figure could be much higher and potential sponsors are being advised to secure around £15,000 to allow for contingency funding with particular regard to the benefits cap.

9. Access to Information

- 9.1. [Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme \(VPRS\) – Guidance for local authorities and partners](#). July 2017
- 9.2. [Home Office guidance for prospective sponsors – Community Sponsorship](#). First published July 2016, last revised July 2017
- 9.3. [Cheshire East Council Cabinet Report 10 Nov 2015](#) - Position on support for Syrian Refugees and Asylum Seekers
- 9.4. [Cheshire East Council Cabinet Report 8 Mar 2016](#) – Update on support for Asylum Seekers and Refugees and Unaccompanied Children
- 9.5. [Cheshire East Council Cabinet Report 13 Sep 2016](#) – Next steps for Syrian Refugees and Unaccompanied Children
- 9.6. [Cheshire East Council Cabinet Report 11 Apr 2017](#) – Syrian Vulnerable Person Relocation and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children Update
- 9.7. [Cheshire East Council Cabinet Report 10 Oct 2017](#) – Support for Syrian Refugees and Asylum Seekers

10. Contact Information

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