

**Agenda Item No: 4**

**Report No: 34/17**

**Report Title: The Syrian Resettlement Programme**

**Report To: Housing Working Group**

**Date: 6 February 2017**

**Cabinet Member: Councillor Ron Maskell, Lead Member for Housing**

**Ward(s) Affected: All**

**Report By: Jennie Perkins  
Housing Needs Manager  
jperkins@lewes.gov.uk**

### **Purpose of Report:**

To provide an update on the Government's Syrian Resettlement Programme.

### **Officers Recommendation(s):**

- 1 To note the content of the report

### **Background**

- 1) In September 2015 UK Government made a commitment to resettle 20,000 Syrian people who are currently displaced and living in Refugee camps in countries neighbouring Syria.
- 2) Local Authorities in the UK were asked to make commitments that would help meet this target. The Districts & Boroughs in East Sussex have committed to resettle up to 260 individuals as part of this programme-spread across the five areas. Lewes District Council, Eastbourne, Wealden and Rother have committed to accommodating 40 individuals and 100 in Hastings.
- 3) Appropriate families are identified and screened via the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). Each family is accepted on the basis of a profile drawn up by UNHCR identifying additional needs that could encompass health, disability, emotional trauma, or special educational needs.
- 4) The unusual part of this programme is that households are granted refugee status in the country they currently reside. They are refugees once they land in the UK as their asylum application has already been processed.

- 5) All families require independent, affordable housing followed up with a holistic support package dependent on their identified needs. Central Government provides tapered funding over a 5 year period with an initial large payment of £8.5K per individual in the first year.
- 6) All families have access to full UK welfare benefits and have a right to work on arrival. Accommodation is funded initially via Housing Benefit. All accommodation is being sourced via the private rented sector and families require access to universal services across Health, Education & Employment on arrival to the UK.

### **The East Sussex Resettlement Programme**

- 7) As a two tier Local Authority, identifying the appropriate strategic and operational managers needed to ensure all the housing, health and support needs of individual families could be met, took some time. At the outset it was recognised that coordinating this work would need dedicated resources and all the Districts and Boroughs in East Sussex pooled funding to appoint 'Syrian Coordinators'. Hastings Borough Council has taken the lead for this work and the coordinators were appointed in September 2016. Lewes District Council has contributed £4,350 towards these 12 month posts which will assist all Local Authorities with the complex arrangements of resettlement.
- 8) Although the Government has committed funding to ensure all the services can be accessed and there is no additional cost to the Local Authorities, there are different processes for each organisation to claim the money and funding is not provided in advance. It has therefore been necessary to engage a range of finance managers in plans and there will be an ongoing requirement to claim funding at specific intervals over the next few years.
- 9) Three Coordinators (two full-time equivalent posts) have been appointed to support the programme across East Sussex. An Operational Working Group has been formed with a range of key services, including Health, Education, the Police and Children's Services, to ensure that the necessary support is in place when families arrive. The local group decide whether each family offered under the programme can have its needs met locally based on this profile provided by the UNHRC.
- 10) East Sussex Community and Faith Action (ESCAFA): An action group of community and faith leaders for the support of Syrian vulnerable families in East Sussex is ensuring that there is a coordinated approach to donations and volunteers. Through ESCAFA, volunteer hubs have been set up in each Local Authority area and plans are underway to deliver a Befriending Training programme for volunteers across East Sussex.
- 11) Charter flights are planned to arrive in Gatwick and Stanstead on a 6 weekly cycle. Once accommodation is identified the coordinators work closely with the Home Office to ensure a suitable family is able to access seats on the flight. Coordinators are required to greet the family at the airport and take them to their new home. If necessary the Home Office will arrange scheduled

flights to ensure the accommodation can be utilised. Funding can be used to cover the void costs for up to eight weeks whilst families are identified.

- 12) The accommodation must be prepared for the family's arrival. All furniture, fixtures and fittings must be suitable for their needs. In addition soft furnishings and household goods are supplied. Clothes and toys are sourced and a weekly grocery shop is provided. Whilst the family await their benefit claim to be processed, the coordinators are authorised to provide a small amount of cash. These requirements are set out in Government guidance for Local Authorities participating in the scheme. The guidance also confirms what is not to be purchased with the funding, such as televisions and computers.
- 13) Intensive support is provided daily during the first few weeks to ensure the family can open a bank account, claim benefits, access health care and access language courses. Interpreters are crucial to enable this to happen. Other support to ensure families can integrate into their community is crucial and so much more successful with the support of volunteers. The level of support needed generally decreases after the first few weeks as families settle into their new life.

### **Progress made in resettling families**

- 14) Approximately 3,000 individuals had been settled around the country at the end of 2016, with 300 of those housed in the south east. As at January 2017, Lewes District Council has resettled three families in Seaford and Newhaven. A total of 23 individuals are now housed in the Lewes District. Eastbourne has housed four people, eight people are accommodated in Wealden, Hastings has ten people and Rother are yet to house any Syrian families through this programme. All these individuals have been settled between October 2016 and January 2017.
- 15) To date families with 'less complex' needs have been accepted into East Sussex but this may change as the programme develops and as support networks strengthen. Support for all families accepted into East Sussex is being developed using the voluntary sector in addition to the support from the Local Authorities and other statutory organisations. Volunteers offer practical support for families, assisting with integration, translation, the provision of furniture and clothing and introduction of families to community activities.

### **Considerations going forward**

- 16) As the number of Syrian families relocating to East Sussex has increased in the past few months, the demand for interpreting services has increased as a direct result. Local Authorities are utilising offers of assistance to help with interpreting from volunteers, although the option to employ an Arabic speaking support worker/translator will need to be considered.

- 17) The range of support the coordinators are required to arrange is resource intensive. Commissioning some of the support services through external providers could be an option going forwards if it's a viable solution. It's a particularly attractive option for translating services and education services which to date have been costly and resource intensive to manage in house.
- 18) Sourcing affordable accommodation in the private rented sector in the south east has been very challenging and is reflected in the relatively low numbers housed in the area to date. Lewes has been fortunate to secure accommodation to date, but the general affordability issue and increasing costs in accessing accommodation must be relayed to the Home Office and Central Government.
- 19) It is important to continue to work with partners to ensure there are sufficient resources in place for key needs such as translation services, emotional well-being, support for children and adults and basic universal services for Health and Education. The contributions that can be made to help meet families identity and cultural needs locally must identified, planned and delivered.
- 20) The joint working, information sharing and project management for this programme must continue to ensure households experience a smooth transition from their refugee camps to the UK. In particular the dialogue with the Home Office and the South East Migration Partnership is vital to continue to benefit from examples of good practice from other Local Authorities and feed back strategic and operational successes and challenges.