

**NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL
DECISION**

**DECISION OF: COUNCILLOR DON DAVIES, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL
WITH ADVICE FROM: SHEILA SMITH DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES
DIRECTORATE: PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES**



DECISION NO: PC 73 2019/20

SUBJECT: EXTENSION TO THE REFUGEE SCHEME

KEY DECISION: YES

REASON: Decision affects residents of more than 2 wards

BACKGROUND:

In his statement to the House of Commons on Monday 7 September 2015, the then Prime Minister announced that in response to the Syrian refugee crisis Britain would resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees over the course of the Parliament, in addition to the 5,000 Syrian refugees that the country had already resettled since 2011. Subsequently Government committed to resettle an additional 3,000 children and their families/carer(s) (of any nationality) from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region over the same period.

To enable this to happen the Government introduced the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS) and the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS). The schemes apply only to refugees still in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region not those who have travelled to Europe.

The VPRS prioritises for resettlement the most vulnerable refugees from Syria who have been displaced to other countries in the region and cannot be supported effectively in their region of origin including women, children and young people at risk, people in severe need of medical care and survivors of torture and violence, refugees with legal and/or physical protection needs; refugees with medical needs or disabilities; refugees with family links in resettlement countries.

The VCRS prioritises the children and their families/carer(s) at risk under the Children at Risk UNHCR vulnerability category. Children can be deemed to be "at risk" by UNHCR for a number of reasons, including: child carers, children at risk of not attending school, children with specific medical needs, children who are survivors (or at risk of) violence, abuse or exploitation.

In July 2017 the Government extended the eligibility for the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme to all those refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria, regardless of their nationality.

The council agreed to take part in both the VPRS and the VCRS and provide accommodation and support initially 3 families (EXE 85, P&C 31 and P&C 69 refer). Subsequently it was agreed to support an additional family (P & C 89 refers) following an offer from Christians Together in Nailsea & District (CTINAD) to work in partnership with the council to enable further refugee families to be supported in North Somerset. Decision making regarding the number of additional refugees to be accommodated in the future was delegated to the Director of People and Communities in consultation with the Leader of the Council. (EXE 85 AND P&C 69 refer).

On 8 January 2018 the Director of People and Communities agreed under delegated powers, in consultation with the then Leader of the Council, to resettle an additional 10 refugee households comprising immediate families and/or carer(s), with young children or vulnerable older people through the VPRS or VCRS over the remainder of the Government's current programme (P&C 36 refers).

The Government also operate a Gateway Protection programme which aims to resettle 750 refugees per year, generally those in protracted refugee situations. Each year, UNHCR publish their Projected Global Resettlement Needs which is used to determine the Gateway caseload which is agreed at ministerial level. Cases are accepted under UNHCR's resettlement submission categories in the same way as the other 2 refugee schemes. People resettled through Gateway must have been living in a protracted refugee situation for over five years, unless there is an urgent need for resettlement (e.g. life endangerment). Government has agreements with a small number of local authorities to accommodate resettled individuals under this scheme and to date North Somerset have not been approached to take part.

Families supported in North Somerset

Accommodation has been secured for 10 families to date comprising 46 people and we have also accepted a transfer of a refugee from another Authority. Since their arrival 3 children have been born and one further is expected shortly.

Progress

English language skills: All adults' refugees are supported through the Council's Community Learning Service to learn the English language either through a group programme or 1 to 1 support. Whilst accessing learning has been challenging for families living in some locations this has been largely mitigated through transport support and home learning options. The adults' learning is progressing at varying rates from pre-entry level to level 2.

Education: All children eligible attend nursery, preschool or school and have settled in well. Schools have worked well and facilitated the places without delay. Post arrival our Early Years Team and Advisory Teacher works closely with the school/Early Years setting to promote a shared understanding of the child's needs and provide access to any necessary support to teaching staff.

Government Year 1 Education Funding has been provided to each school or nursery setting through the programme. Typically, settings have used this funding to provide additional adult support for a child and this has proved successful in promoting their effective inclusion and achievement.

Health: All families have completed health assessments and had access to the relevant services (doctors/dentists) relating to their health and wellbeing. The Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) have organised full health assessments in line with the Government Funding Instruction and been responsible for arranging the addition of the families to the local GP practice patient list. Dental services have been provided through NHS dentists local to where the families live.

Employment: Each adult refugee brings with them a variety of employment experiences, knowledge, qualifications and aspirations. The scheme has formed a good relationship with the local Job Centres regarding supporting adults to access activities, alongside partnership work with Weston College, the voluntary sector and Team North Somerset. A number of the refugees have particularly benefitted from volunteering opportunities.

The Job centre is also providing a Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card course for refugees including the provision of an interpreter. This will allow access to building trades and to sites as it covers the Health and Safety requirements.

Accommodation: Given the high demand and limited supply of social housing, refugees have been housed in private rented housing or homes owned by Housing Associations which are not available for letting for secure tenancies. The main source of accommodation has been through the generosity of philanthropic individuals in North Somerset who have either purchased accommodation specifically for the scheme or provided tenancies in existing accommodation at Housing Benefit rates.

Funding: to support the families funding has been received from Government in accordance with national Funding Instructions (see Financial Implications below for further details). All costs incurred in supporting the families in accordance with the scheme including direct costs and the cost of the staff time have been fully met through the funding and are projected to continue to be met in the future.

Outcomes: Outcomes to date are promising with the families settling into North Somerset well. Once families have been in the area for 6 months, they complete an assessment of how they feel they are progressing. In summary this shows they feel safe in their home, are registered with appropriate services and are supported by workers and volunteers and overall are very positive about residing in North Somerset and their experience so far in the area

Scheme Coordination: The scheme is supported by a Coordinator/Project Manager who has oversight of the accommodation, arrival, support and integration of all families. This role is supported by the following:

- Project Officer who accesses accommodation and supports the volunteers
- Family Support Worker who provides support for families
- Staff in each of the key service areas
- 3 Groups of volunteers.
 - Churches Together in Nailsea and District

- o Salvation Army
- o Refugees Welcome North Somerset

The volunteer groups comprise a total of approximately 75 volunteers. The volunteer support has been invaluable in facilitating access to services and supporting integration within the community. The volunteers are a fundamental part of the success of the programme to date.

Summary: The scheme has developed well over the past 3 years with the help of a range of philanthropic individuals and volunteers and their organisations who have supported the families and the project. This places the initiative in a positive position moving forward.

The future scheme

In June, Ministers wrote to the leaders of local authorities across the UK setting out key elements of a statement made by the then Home Secretary reaffirming the UK's ongoing commitment to resettlement. This statement set out that following the conclusion of the current schemes in 2020 the UK aimed to resettle around 5,000 refugees in the first year of a new UK Resettlement Scheme.

The new UK Resettlement Scheme will consolidate the existing VPRS, VCRS and Gateway Protection Programme which will all come to an end once the existing Government targets for the existing schemes have been met. This new scheme will be open to refugees identified by UNHCR to be in need of resettlement to the UK because of their vulnerability and will not have a specific geographical focus. The new scheme will continue to be based on vulnerability, with refugees assessed for resettlement by UNHCR against their resettlement submission categories, in the same way as the existing schemes

In the first year of the new scheme it is anticipated that the caseloads of refugees resettled will be broadly similar to those under the existing schemes, with the majority coming from the MENA region. However, over time the nationalities of refugees resettled may change in response to world events and the global context.

The existing UK arrangements which enable refugees to access services, support and employment across the UK will continue under the new scheme. Funding for Local Authorities and CCGs will be set in the same way as under the VCRS and VPRS and has been confirmed for refugees arriving over the first year of the new scheme.

North Somerset future participation

In the light of the positive outcomes achieved for refugee families through North Somerset Councils participation in the VPRS and VCRS and the continuing need for Local Authorities to support the resettlement programme, it is recommended that North Somerset Council commits to taking part in the new UK Resettlement Scheme.

It is not known when the new scheme will start as it depends on when the Government target for the existing schemes is met, however based on progress to date it is expected this will be in early to mid-2020. In addition, Government funding for the new scheme has only been confirmed for refugees arriving during the first year of the new scheme. Based on achievements to date it is recommended that North Somerset commit to resettling a further 10 households over the first 3 years of the new scheme; subject to the availability of

Government funding for refugees and suitable accommodation. The recommended number is based on a consideration of the limited supply of accommodation where the rent can be met through Housing Benefit, the resources needed and the capacity of services to manage the arrival, settlement and integration of refugee families and the availability of school and Early Years places. It is also recommended that decision making about the number of additional refugees to be accommodated in North Somerset in the future is delegated to the Director of People and Communities; this could include agreeing additional households over the 10 recommended during first 3 years of the new scheme if circumstances permit.

It is also recommended that the criteria for North Somerset involvement in the current and future schemes are extended to encompass all forms of household composition, to provide increased flexibility. In the interim North Somerset Councils' participation in the existing schemes would otherwise remain unchanged as we endeavour to meet the overall commitment to resettle 14 households, as previously agreed.

DECISION:

1. To authorise officers to respond to Government confirming that North Somerset Council would be willing to take part in the new UK Resettlement Scheme
2. To agree to resettle 10 refugee households over the first 3 years of the new UK Settlement Scheme; subject to the availability of Government funding for the scheme and the availability of suitable accommodation.
3. To delegate decision making about the number of additional refugees to be accommodated in North Somerset in the future under the new UK Resettlement Scheme to the Director of People and Communities in consultation with the Leader of the Council.
4. To delegate decision making regarding the acceptance of individual households under the new UK Resettlement Scheme to the Head of Housing and Strategy
5. To extend the current commitments made by the council under the VPRS and VCRS to include all forms of household composition.

REASONS:

To enable an additional refugee households to be accommodated and supported

OPTIONS CONSIDERED:

Not agreeing to take additional households would mean further refugee families would not be able to be relocated to North Somerset.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Costs and funding - The funding arrangements to meet the costs incurred in supporting refugee families through the VPRS and VCRS are set out in 'Funding Instructions' issued jointly by the Home Office, DfiD and DCLG. Funding Instructions are issued annually, and funding levels may be reviewed and varied by Government from time to time; the figures below should therefore be regarded as indicative. Government have stated that the funding package available under the new scheme will mirror that currently paid under VPRS and VCRS;

In summary the council currently receives funding of £8,520 per person for the first 12 months following the refugees arrival to meet the costs incurred and an additional £4,500 for each child aged 5-18 years and £2,250 for each child aged 3 or 4 towards the costs of education/early years provision (in subsequent years, funding is through the normal education funding regime). Health costs for year 1 are met through a separate agreement between Government and the CCG.

In years 2-5 funding tapers from £5,000 per person in year 2 to £3,700 in year 3, £2,300 in year 4 and £1,000 in year 5.

Additional funding will continue to be made available, on a case by case basis, for exceptional costs incurred by local authorities, including; property adaptations, void costs for larger (4 bed) properties, special educational needs, and adult social care.

The costs of council staff involved in supporting the refugees and in co-ordinating and managing the project will continue to be met through the funding received from Government.

All costs incurred in supporting the families in accordance with the scheme including direct costs and the cost of the staff time have been fully met through the funding and are projected to continue to be met in the future.

Implications for Future Years - Refugees are entitled to access public funds/services and access the labour market and are granted limited leave to remain for a 5-year period. At the end of the 5-year period refugees can apply for permanent residency. Any costs in providing services after this time would need to be met by the council and other service providers

LEGAL POWERS AND IMPLICATIONS

The council will continue to have statutory responsibilities to provide services for refugees in the same way as for the settled population.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

No specific implications

CONSULTATION

Consultation has taken place with: Prevention of NEET Manager, People and Communities; Operational Manager, Impact/High Impact Families, Corporate Services; Head of Housing and Strategy, People and Communities; Assistant Director, Children's Support & Safeguarding, People and Communities; Finance Business Partner (People and Communities), Corporate Services; Pupil Places and Planning Manager, People and Communities; Equality and Diversity Manager Corporate Services; Service Leader Learning and Development Corporate Services; South West Migration Partnership; Clinical Commissioning Group.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Not being able to meet the support needs of refugees resettled in the area – low risk in the light of the range of services available and the funding support from government including the availability of exceptional circumstances funding.

Lack of school places to meet needs – low/medium risk in the light of the checks on availability that are undertaken prior to accommodation being accepted. If school places were not available within the maximum travel to school distance, home to school transport would need to be provided and resourced through the funding income from Government

Lack of accommodation at an affordable rent to enable the resettlement of a further 10 households - medium risk however close partnership working would take place to mitigate this risk as far as possible.

Competing pressures for accommodation and services - the Home Office are working with their accommodation provider to identify further local authorities to take part in asylum seeker dispersal. There is a high risk that the council's ability to resettle refugees would be compromised if there were a decision to accommodate asylum seekers in North Somerset, given the pressures on the local housing market and services.

Government funding for the new UK Resettlement Scheme does not extend for refugees arriving after year 1 or reduces – this is considered low risk. If funding ceased no further refugees would be resettled after the first year of the new scheme. If funding reduced North Somerset Councils' commitment/involvement in the schemes would be reviewed.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

Have you undertaken an Equality Impact Assessment? Yes

The decision to resettle up to an additional 10 refugee households in North Somerset will have a high and positive impact for those households who will have a range of protected characteristics.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

The resettlement of additional refugees in North Somerset will continue to require the involvement and support of services across the council (and partners) depending on the needs of the refugees.

APPENDICES

None

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Decisions of the Director of People and Communities - P & C 31, P & C 69 P & C 89 (2016/17), P & C 36 (2017/18)

Report to the Executive – 2 February 2016 – Syrian refugees (EXE 85)

UK Resettlement Scheme - Note for Local Authorities – Home Office 2019

SIGNATORIES:

DECISION MAKER(S):

Signed: [Signature]

Title: Leader of the Council

Date: 8.1.20

WITH ADVICE FROM:

Signed: [Signature]

Title: Director People and Communities

Date: 8.1.20

Footnote: Details of changes made and agreed by the decision taker since publication of the proposed (pre-signed) decision notice, if applicable:

