

NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL**DECISION OF COUNCILLOR NIGEL ASHTON, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL
with advice from the DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES****DECISION NO: P&C69****SUBJECT: Extension of refugee scheme scope in light of national changes****DECISION:**

1. To agree that North Somerset Council shall take part in the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) and provide accommodation and support for households comprising immediate families and/or carer(s), with young children, alongside the commitment the council has already made to take part in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons' Relocation Scheme (SVPRS) and that the number of households accepted be determined as set out below.
2. To agree that in implementing the Executive and Director Decisions to initially accept 3 refugee households through the SVPRS (EXE 85 and P & C 31 refer) the opportunity to include households supported through the VCRS be considered and to delegate decision making regarding the acceptance of individual households to the Head of Housing and Strategy.
3. To agree that any future review of the potential to take additional households through the SVPRS be extended to also include households covered by the VCRS and to delegate decision making about the number of additional refugees to be accommodated in North Somerset in the future to the Director of People and Communities in consultation with the Leader of the Council.
4. To agree that the refugees supported and accommodated through the VCRS could be housed in existing or new build affordable housing for rent or private rented sector accommodation depending on availability and suitability.

BACKGROUND:

In 2015 Government announced that Britain would resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees over the course of the current Parliament. To enable this to happen Government expanded the existing Syrian Vulnerable Persons' Relocation Scheme (SVPRS). At its meeting of 2 February 2016 the Executive considered a report concerning the SVPRS

The Executive resolved (EXE 85 refers) :

- (1) that officers be authorised to respond to Government confirming that North Somerset Council would be willing to take part in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons'*

Relocation Scheme and provide accommodation and support initially for up to 3 households comprising immediate families with young children or vulnerable older people.

- (2) that decision making regarding entering into agreements with Government to facilitate North Somerset Councils participation in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons' Relocation Scheme be delegated to the Director of People and Communities, in consultation with the Leader of the Council;*
- (3) that officers regularly review the potential to take additional households in the light of the Council's experience of accommodating and supporting the initial households, and the decision regarding the number of additional refugees to be accommodated in North Somerset in the future be delegated to the Director of People and Communities, in consultation with the Leader of the Council; and*
- (4) that refugees be housed in existing or new build affordable housing for rent or private rented sector accommodation depending on availability and suitability.*

Subsequently the Director of People and Communities in consultation with the Leader of the Council authorised the acceptance of up to 3 households comprising immediate families with young children or vulnerable older people under the SVPRS and delegated decision making regarding the acceptance of individual households to the Head of Housing and Directorate Governance (Decision P&C 31 refers).

Subsequent to the Executive resolutions Government committed to resettle an additional 3000 children and their families/carer(s) from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region over the life of the Parliament under the Children at Risk UNHCR vulnerability category and introduced the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS). 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.

The scheme is open to all nationalities of refugees living in the MENA region not just Syrians. Syrians may be resettled under the Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme usually where one parent is stateless or there is mixed nationality. Refugees will be resettled from the host countries for the SVPRS.

All cases will be referred by UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and are granted Humanitarian Protection status upon arrival in the UK. Government have recently announced that from July 2017 this will change and refugee status will be granted in place of Humanitarian Protection status to all those resettled through the SVPRS and VCRS.

It is anticipated that the vast majority of children will arrive with their parent(s), with the remainder arriving with other carers or on their own. Children who arrive with their families or carer(s) will be supported through this scheme which will operate in a very similar way to the SVPRS. Children who are unaccompanied will be supported separately and will be placed with a local authority through the existing National Transfer Schemes.

Government have advised that resettlement of children with their families and carer(s) will be funded using the same resettlement tariffs as the SVPRS. In summary the council would receive 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 will be through the normal education funding regime). If additional costs are incurred in 'compelling circumstances' in relation to educational (children under the age of 18) or social care needs the council would be able to apply for additional funding and provision is also made to meet other 'exceptional costs' assessed on a case by case basis. Health costs for year 1 will be met through a separate agreement between Government and the CCG.

In years 2-5 funding would taper 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, in line with the SVPRS. It is anticipated, in line with the SVPRS, that funding (subject to periodic review by Government) would also be made available to meet any additional 'exceptional costs' assessed on a case by case basis.

The funding arrangements will be set out in 'Funding Instructions' issued jointly by the Home Office, DfiD and DCLG (one covering the first 12 months from the refugees arrival into the UK and one covering the following 4 years). Funding Instructions are issued annually and funding levels maybe reviewed and varied by Government from time to time.

Where children arrive with carer(s) rather than their parent(s) there would be some additional considerations. Depending on the degree of kinship with the adults caring for them, some of these families may meet the definition of private fostering. In these cases the local authority will need to assess the placement and monitor the overall standard of care. It is anticipated that there is a low likelihood of this scenario arising.

In some cases the carer(s) may need assistance to make legal applications for Special Guardianship to ensure that the child is best supported and protected. The council would inform the adult carer(s) on the need to apply for Special Guardianship and help the carer to make the appropriate applications to the court. The Government have advised that they consider the potential number of cases where this level of assistance may be required nationally is likely to be low and that they will work with the local authority involved on a case by case basis to consider reimbursement for any additional costs associated with resolving guardianship arrangements

To enable the council to be able to provide support to accompanied refugee children (and their families/carer(s)) who do not qualify under the SVPRS but would qualify under the VCRS it is recommend that the council's commitment to participate in the SVPRS is extended to the VCRS. The number of households to be accommodated would be included within the current commitment of 3 households and in any future decision by the Director of People and Communities regarding the number of additional refugees to be accommodated in North Somerset.

Reasons:

To enable the council to be able to provide support to accompanied refugee children who do not qualify under the SVPRS but would qualify under the VCRS.

Other Alternatives Considered:

Not taking part in this scheme would mean that refugees covered by the VCRS would not be able to be relocated to North Somerset.

Financial Implications:

It is anticipated that the funding provided by Government in the first year would be sufficient to cover the costs involved. There is some risk that the income from Government over the 5 year period does not cover costs however it is anticipated that Government will make provision to meet agreed exceptional costs to provide additional support for the most vulnerable persons which could help mitigate any shortfall which will otherwise need to be covered through mainstream expenditure.

Implications for Future Years:

Refugees are entitled to access to public funds/services and access the labour market, and are granted a visa/leave to remain initially for a 5 year period which also provides for the possibility of a family reunion. Funding will be provided for the 5 year period as set out above.

Signed:
Councillor Nigel Ashton
Leader of the Council

Dated:

Reviewed:
Mark Hughes
Head of Housing and Strategy

Dated:

Confirmation of advice given:

Signed:
Sheila Smith
Director, People and Communities

Dated: