



CABINET

19TH NOVEMBER 2015

AGENDA ITEM (8)

SYRIAN REFUGEE PROPOSAL

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| Accountable Member | Councillor Sue Coakley Cabinet Member for Health, Environment and Communities Councillor Sue Jepson Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing |
| Accountable Officer | Jon Dearing Joint Head of Revenues and Housing Support 01285 623304 jon.dearing@cotswold.gov.uk |
| Purpose of Report | To consider a proposal to accept five Syrian Refugee families, in a phased approach commencing from December 2015. |
| Recommendation(s) | (a) That the proposal to accept five Syrian refugee families in a phased approach commencing in December 2015, as set out in Appendix A to this report, be approved; (b) that the proposal be despatched immediately to the Home Office. |
| Reason(s) for Recommendation(s) | To contribute to the Government's commitment to accept 20,000 Syrian refugees to the UK during the current Parliament. |
| Ward(s) Affected | To be determined |
| Key Decision | No |
| Recommendation to Council | No |
| Financial Implications | The Council's proposal includes details of the grant funding that will be made available by the Home Office for at least the first twelve months. The refugees will have full recourse to public funds, so the major on-going cost (rental liability) will be covered by Housing Benefit entitlement; until such time as the Council can assist them to secure employment. |
| Legal and Human Rights Implications | None |
| Environmental and Sustainability Implications | None |

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| Human Resource Implications | None |
| Key Risks | There is a reputational risk around prioritising refugees over existing CDC residents on the Housing Waiting List. However, the low numbers and using the Private rented sector, wherever possible, will significantly reduce that risk. |
| Equalities Analysis | None |

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| Related Decisions | None |
| Background Documents | None |
| Appendices | Appendix A - Proposal to the Home Office. |

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| Performance Management Follow Up | (i) Implement Cabinet decision(s). (ii) The Revenues and Housing Support Service will monitor any impact on resources. |
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| Options for Joint Working | The proposal is very similar to that agreed at West Oxfordshire District Council, and the delivery of the support package will be a joint effort. |
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| Background Information | |
| <p>1. The Government has committed to receive 20,000 Syrian refugees over the period of the current Parliament (including 1,000 by the end of December 2015). Refugees will be given leave to remain in the UK for five years, with full recourse to public funds. The Home Office is looking for all Local Authorities to contribute to this national effort.</p> <p>2. The Home Office's latest advice is that the need is around families and single males. There is currently limited need in relation to Syrian orphans and unaccompanied children, as the UN believes that they have a much better chance of locating the parents/closest relatives of these children if they accommodate and care for them at/near the camps where they first presented themselves.</p> <p>3. In statistical terms, if all areas were to take refugees in proportion to their populations, this would equate to 32 per 100,000 population to meet the stated 20,000 government target. A local figure of five families for Cotswold District sits comfortably with this national target and could be regarded, therefore, as a robust initial offer from this Council and the residents of the Cotswolds.</p> <p>4. The informal refugee working group within the Council has been keeping Members up to date with developments, and the activities of the County-wide approach. Press releases have been keeping residents up to date, and there is a depository of useful information on the Council's Website.</p> <p>5. One of the key factors within the proposal is the provision of safe, self-contained, long-term accommodation. Officers have been seeking private sector accommodation in the first instance, to avoid conflict with waiting list issues, and this remains the preferred solution rather than social sector rentals.</p> <p>6. However, should it prove necessary for nominations to be made to one or more registered social landlords in the District, the approved Housing Allocations Policy does give discretionary permission, under section 2.16, to circumvent all other qualifying criteria where there is a risk to life in</p> | |

the area where the applicant is currently living. The Policy's Banding system allows escalation to the Emergency Band where there are "Exceptional circumstances while there is a threat to life or limb". This means that we will be able to provide Social Sector housing within the existing Policy. However, Private sector housing will be utilised wherever possible.

7. Attached at **Appendix A** is the proposal that has been developed by the working group and the intention, if approved, is to despatch this to the Home Office.

8. In the absence of private and social sector rented accommodation, consideration could also be given to purchasing properties to accommodate Syrian refugee families which could later be used as general emergency/temporary accommodation (or released back to the private or social sector). The timescales around that would clearly exceed the phase 1 (i.e. March 2016) part of the attached proposal. Therefore, a detailed 'property purchase' report will be brought forward separately, which will seek to consider the wider range of legal issues around such a proposal such as avoiding the necessity to re-establish a Housing Revenue Account.

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