

**COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
PROPOSAL TO RECEIVE REFUGEES FROM SYRIA**

INTRODUCTION

This paper proposes a plan to welcome, house and support five refugee families from Syria to the Cotswolds during the end of 2015 and early 2016. The proposal is for a phased approach from December 2015 (or earlier as required) through until June 2016. The proposal has full Member and Officer support.

BACKGROUND

Cotswold District Council is aware of the current Syrian refugee crisis and of the commitment by the UK Government to receive and accommodate 20,000 refugees over the period of the current parliament; and that there is a national target to accept the first 1,000 refugees by the end of December 2015.

Our Members, Officers and residents can see the daily impact of the Syrian Crisis and Cotswold District Council fully acknowledges the need to urgently review its current position in terms of accepting refugees as soon as is practical.

Cotswold District Council is fully committed to welcoming and housing refugees in our area, as part of the national effort, but is also aware that this commitment needs to be balanced with existing local needs; particularly around provision of housing.

The authority is continuing to contribute towards the Gloucestershire County-wide response and is keeping the relevant parties informed of all of our actions but we feel that we are currently in a position to take some proactive positive action ahead of current County-wide timescales to help ensure the safety of a number of refugees.

PROPOSAL

We propose to take five families in two phases, as follows:

1. Phase One (three families, subject to availability of housing) to be received before end of March 2016 to the Cirencester and/or Moreton-in Marsh areas. We would prefer to take families, at this stage, without significant health issues because of the short timescales and limited accommodation and resource options. We believe that we could accommodate family units including up to four children.
2. Phase Two (two families, subject to housing availability) to be received before end of June 2016 to the Cirencester and/or Moreton-in Marsh areas.

HOUSING PROPOSAL

The Cotswold District Council Housing Team is in the process of sourcing a mixture of Social and Private Sector (with a preference for private sector) long term self-contained accommodation (houses) which we would use to house the refugees. These properties are being sourced within two of the District's main Towns (Cirencester and Moreton-in-Marsh). We will ensure that all properties are adequately furnished and that families are provided with bedding, towels, crockery etc.

Additionally, officers are putting together a package of support to ensure a smooth transition and on-going support within Cotswold District.

SUPPORT PROPOSAL

The package would include the following for a minimum of twelve months -

We will provide a dedicated point of contact (Scheme Manager) at the Local Authority starting their support from the 'meet and greet' stage to help the refugees settle into their accommodation. However, we consider this to be a long term proposal and will ensure that we have dedicated staff allocated to the scheme for a period of at least the first 12 months to ensure that the families settle into their new surroundings and the community. We would ensure that there is an emergency contact at Cotswold District Council who the families can contact at any time for support needs that they may have. This would include details of how they can access help out of hours.

Specifically, our proposal includes several actions:

- We will provide good quality self-contained family accommodation within communities with all of the necessary amenities in close proximity.
- We will provide a welcome pack which would consist of £200 cash; as well as food and clothing (and other necessary provisions).
- We will ensure that each family has access to a translation service to help them while they are learning the English language. We would ensure enrolment on English Language Courses (within the first month of their arrival) to ensure their integration into the local community.
- We will work with the refugee families to ensure that they are receiving the welfare benefits that they are entitled to; and will ensure that Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support are processed and paid immediately (as we have direct control over the administration of those benefits).
- We will facilitate the families' interaction with all of the key contacts that they may need (GP's; health centres; children's centres; hospitals; childcare organisations; education department; Job Centre+; utility companies; local faith organisations etc).
- We will work with families and school admissions to ensure that children are registered at local schools as soon as possible following their arrival; and that families have the necessary support to ensure their happiness and wellbeing.
- We will ensure that the adults have bank accounts set up for day to day management of finances/benefits and will provide money management support and advice.
- We will provide a pack which would include details of emergency services, local organisations and contact details of other local refugee families (with their consent) which may be of use to 'our families' in their initial period in this country.
- We will work with other government organisations (e.g. Social Services and Health Departments) to ensure that all aspects of the families' well-being are addressed.
- We will work closely (and provide financial support to) local Voluntary Sector organisations in Gloucestershire. In particular we will be working to ensure that families have support and opportunities to integrate into their new communities.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Our understanding is that the following table represents a system of set funding arrangements to cover all costs in Year 1:

UNIT COST FOR SYRIA VPR SCHEME					
	Adult Benefit Claimant	Other Adults	Children 5-18	Children 3-4	Children U-3
	£	£	£	£	£
Local Authority Costs	8,520	8,520	8,520	8,520	8,520
Education	0	0	4,500	2,250	0
Special Educational Needs	0	0	1,000	1,000	0
DWP Benefits	12,700	0	0	0	0
Primary medical care	200	200	200	200	200
Secondary medical care	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000
TOTALS	23,420	10,720	16,220	13,970	10,720

To Cotswold District Council this essentially means **£8,520 per person** in Year 1. We have evaluated the potential cost of our proposal, in terms of Housing, Resource provision and securing Voluntary Sector support services and are satisfied that we can deliver a sensitive and holistic support package to these families, within this funding structure.

I hope that this proposal meets with the requirements that you have in relation to the refugee crisis and the individuals involved. We do not under-estimate the severity of the situation that the refugees have been in, the seriousness of the long-term commitment that we are making or the resources and time that this Proposal demands.

Please let me know if you require any further information or clarification. I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest opportunity.

Kind Regards

Jon Dearing

Head of Revenues and Housing Support
Cotswold District Council

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