

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	19 January 2016
Subject:	Syrian Refuges Motion
Report of:	Val Garside, Environmental and Housing Services Group Manager
Corporate Lead:	Rachel North, Deputy Chief Executive
Lead Member:	Cllr R E Allen, Lead Member for Health and Wellbeing
Number of Appendices:	1

Executive Summary:

Following referral of a Notice of Motion from the Council Meeting on 8 December 2015, asking the Council to help coordinate and support limited numbers of displaced Syrian families to settle within Gloucestershire, this report provides factual information on the potential impact on Gloucestershire and Tewkesbury Borough.

Recommendation:

To RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL whether or not the Motion to work with partners across Gloucestershire to assist displaced Syrian families to settle within the county should be supported.

Reasons for Recommendation:

The Council, at its meeting on 8 December 2015, asked the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider, in more detail, the potential impact/implications of the resettlement of Syrian refugees on the Borough and to advise the Council whether to support the Motion based on this information and the role expected of the Borough Council as a non-stock holding authority.

Resource Implications:

Funding is to be provided by the Home Office.

Legal Implications:

No legal implications arising as a result of this report

Risk Management Implications:

The resettlement process will be carefully monitored to ensure that Gloucestershire plays its part in the resettlement process in a fair and equitable manner both to the refugees and the residents of the Borough.

Performance Management Follow-up:

Monitoring and update reports will be provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Environmental Implications:

N/A

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 At its meeting on 8 December 2015, the Council received the following Motion and referred it to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration:

‘Tewkesbury Borough Council notes that more than six million Syrian people have been displaced by civil war within their homeland and three million have fled to neighbouring countries’.

The Prime Minister and the United Kingdom government are keen to support twenty thousand refugees seeking sanctuary and have pledged £215m over the next five years to help rebuild their lives within this country.

I would ask Members of this Council to join with other agencies, including ‘Severn Vale Housing Trust’ and ‘GARAS’ to help coordinate and support limited numbers of displaced Syrian families settle within the County of Gloucestershire’

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 The UK is at the forefront of the response to the crisis in Syria and this expansion is part of the comprehensive approach to help refugees in the region, recognising that, for some people, the only solution is to bring them to countries like the UK.

2.2 The UK already has significant experience of resettling vulnerable people and the existing domestic resettlement mechanisms provide a basis for a relatively quick increase in numbers.

2.3 Over the coming weeks and months, the government will work with local authorities, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and others to put in place the full structures to ensure that the arrangements can be scaled up to meet the aim of bringing up to 20,000 Syrians over the lifetime of this Parliament.

2.4 The Syrian Vulnerable Person Repatriation is based on need, it prioritises those who cannot be supported effectively in their region of origin: women and children at risk; people in severe need of medical care and survivors of violence and/or torture; refugees with legal and/or physical protection needs; refugees with medical needs or disabilities; children and adolescents at risk; persons at risk due to their sexual orientation or gender identity; and refugees with family links in resettlement countries.

3.0 ELIGIBILITY AND SECURITY CHECKS

3.1 There will be three security checks made by the Home Office, along with border control, checks through Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) database, and biometric tests, to check against the Government’s Contest Strategy. Medical checks will be carried out by the Home Office. The intention is to buddy families up with Syrians and Refugees who are already living in the country. Cases will then be passed to local authorities who have indicated they will participate in the scheme. The local authority can accept or reject cases.

4.0 FUNDING

4.1 Funding has been secured through the Comprehensive Spending Review process to assist local authorities with costs. The first 12 months of refugees resettlement costs are funded on a tariff basis by the Government using the overseas aid budget and a guarantee has been made that funding would be available for year's two to five. The Chancellor has now confirmed that the Government will provide additional funding to assist with costs that they believe will be incurred by local authorities.

4.2 Year two funding will be allocated on a tariff basis over four years, tapering from £5,000 per person in year two to £1,000 per person in year five. The funding includes support for integration such as additional English language training as well as social care. Special cases will be provided with additional support for the most vulnerable persons.

5.0 GLOUCESTERSHIRE APPROACH

5.1 Within Gloucestershire, many districts and Registered Housing Providers have offered to house families. Properties will need to be carefully chosen based on access to services already provided in Cheltenham and Gloucester for refugees e.g. language lessons, faith groups, churches and charities.

5.2 The Leader of the County Council Mark Hawthorne and Richard Harrington MP, the Minister, has challenged the County of Gloucestershire to take a number of refugee families before Christmas. As a result, Gloucestershire has currently agreed on a coordinated countywide approach to Syrian Refugees and Stewart Edgar, Chief Fire Officer is the lead. Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (GARAS), will lead on the support required to assist refugees as it has over 16 years of experience in dealing with this matter and is well placed to provide effective support.

5.3 Tewkesbury Borough Council, as a non-stock (housing) holding authority would have a very limited role.

5.4 As such, Officers have had discussions with our principal local social housing provider, Severn Vale Housing Society, and agreement has been reached that it would house one family from its stock in the early part of the New Year, subject to evaluation of how the process has worked and how the family fit in, and would consider further families on a one by one basis. Careful management of letting properties will take place to ensure that families already registered on Gloucestershire Homeseeker would not be disadvantaged. A maximum number of approximately five families are being considered an appropriate number.

5.5 Regular information sharing and coordination within the Public Service Centre to include all our partner agencies in the resettlement is ongoing, as Health, Police and Care Services are all required by Government to participate.

6.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

6.1 None

7.0 CONSULTATION

7.1 None

8.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES

8.1 None

9.0 RELEVANT GOVERNMENT POLICIES

9.1 Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme.

10.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (Human/Property)

10.1 None

11.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (Social/Community Safety/Cultural/ Economic/ Environment)

11.1 None

12.0 IMPACT UPON (Value For Money/Equalities/E-Government/Human Rights/Health And Safety)

12.1 None

13.0 RELATED DECISIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT FACTS

13.1 None

Background Papers: None

Contact Officer: Val Garside, Environmental and Housing Services Group Manager
01684 272259 Val.Garside@tewkesbury.gov.uk

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Syrian Refugee Settlement Programme