

REPORT OF: HOUSING, HEALTH AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
MANAGER

TO: EXECUTIVE

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SYRIAN RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMME (SRP) & ASYLUM DISPERSAL

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To update Executive regarding the implementation of the SRP and Asylum Dispersal in Pendle

RECOMMENDATION

To note developments in relation to the implementation of SRP and Asylum Dispersal in Pendle

ISSUE

Syrian Refugee Program (SRP) in Pendle

As a response to the Syrian Refugee crisis, the Council offered to welcome twenty Syrian refugee households to the borough. Following confirmation that the Home Office requires regional or sub-regional approaches to resettlement of refugees rather than via individual authorities, it was agreed that Lancashire County Council (LCC) would co-ordinate a sub-regional offer for Lancashire (inc BwD and Blackpool). In aiming to meet its commitment, the Council has subsequently agreed to accept ten Syrian Refugee households in year 1 as part of this Lancashire-wide initiative, with an option to accept a further ten households in year 2 of the scheme.

The four district Councils (inc Pendle) who have committed to rehousing Syrian Refugees in year 1 of the scheme along with LCC have agreed to synchronise the arrival of refugees to maximise use of resources.

In taking forward SRP in Pendle:-

- An indicative budget has been set, which will not result in any cost to the Council
- The Council has / will agree a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with LCC in terms of delivering services.

- Rossendale Borough Council, as a Registered Provider of social housing, will provide ten renovated properties within the borough for use by Syrian Refugee households. The Refugees will be entitled to claim housing benefit / Universal Credit Housing Payment to cover the rental cost of these properties.
- An exemption from procurement rules has been agreed which allows the Council to enter into a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Calico Enterprise to deliver specialist support services to refugees including:-
 - Meet & greet / intensive orientation support
 - Caseworker / floating support provision for one year after arrival
- It is anticipated that Calico will take the 'lead', in terms of delivering and co-ordinating support for refugees and that, subject to agreement, the current Pendle – Resettlement of Refugee Steering Group (P-RRSG) will continue to support refugee resettlement by
 - Acting as a consultative body to assist Calico Enterprise in supporting refugees
 - Contributing towards wider support for refugees to ensure their welcome and successful integration into the host population of Pendle
 - Contributing towards services which help the refugees achieve independent living within the community.
 - Contributing towards monitoring arrangements for the service by receiving timely updates on the progress of SRP in Pendle area
 - It would be intended, subject to agreement with the Pendle – Resettlement of Refugee Steering Group (P-RRSG), to expand the remit of this group to also provide support as required for asylum seekers (see below)

Pendle will receive Syrian refugee arrivals in Autumn 2016

Asylum Dispersal

The Council, along with all Lancashire authorities, have been requested by the Home Office to help in ensuring that the United Kingdom is able to discharge its obligations to accommodate those who are in the process of claiming asylum. In order to cope with demand in numbers, the Home Office has advised that the most equitable and sustainable long-term solution is to increase the number of local areas across the UK that participate in asylum seeker dispersal. Leadership Group has considered this request and decided to participate.

Council officers have since met with a representative from the Home Office and Serco - [COMPASS Contract provider](#) and it has been agreed that:-

- The Council will participate in a 'pilot' scheme whereby Serco can use five properties for asylum dispersal. Number of households has not been specified as Serco may use some / all properties as houses in multiple occupation (HMO's) and potentially rehouse differing numbers of asylum seeker households subject to demand.
- Serco intend to seek properties in areas where it would be affordable for asylum seekers to continue to reside should their asylum claim be successful and where there are relatively accessible local amenities.
- Serco will notify the Council of potential properties they are interested in. The Council will be able to undertake a '*Post Code Consultation*' to determine whether the property being sought by Serco is acceptable. Whilst the Council has power of veto over particular properties chosen, there does need to be very good reason for doing so eg community safety issues.

It is anticipated that Serco, as part of the COMPASS contract will:-

- Provide dispersed accommodation within Pendle which meets all housing standards required
- As asylum seekers are unable to work legally or access benefits, provide [financial support](#) as required

- Support asylum seekers to access local services / amenities as required

Typically, asylum seeker claims can take up to 6 months but potentially longer depending on complexity of the case. Once the Home Office has determined the claim, the asylum seeker is required to leave dispersed accommodation regardless of outcome. Whilst Serco would not be able to enforce eviction without a court order, the Council will be expected to assist Serco in helping households move on. Once the household has left the accommodation, another asylum seeker household will be allocated space in the property. As such, over time a significant number of asylum seekers may be rehoused in the accommodation provided.

Anecdotal evidence from neighbouring local authorities suggest that often, once an asylum seeker has had their application determined (and subject to it being approved), they may decide to move into areas where there may already be a sizeable population from their country/area of origin and/or potentially increased economic opportunity eg within large cities. Over time this may change as successful asylum seekers choose to settle locally where they may have developed roots eg by having children in schools, employment in the area etc. Housing Needs will be informed when an asylum seeker has had their application approved and will provide support for the person/family to find suitable accommodation if they wish to remain in Pendle. They would be entitled to work and claim benefits at this stage.

Once the initial five properties have been occupied officers will meet again with Serco to discuss progress and any issues that have arisen. It is anticipated that the Home Office will then request the Council to agree to further properties.

IMPLICATIONS

Policy

There are no policy implications arising from this report.

Financial

Under SRP, the indicative budget will not result in any cost to the Council. Asylum Dispersal is not initially expected to result in cost to the Council as Serco bear all costs. However, there could potentially be costs in securing rehousing for successful asylum seekers, should the Council owe duties under homelessness legislation.

Legal

Under SRP, a MoU will be in put in place between LCC and Pendle BC. The Council will subsequently enter into a SLA with Calico Enterprise for the delivery of such services and protect its position.

Risk Management

There is risk to reputation should the Council fail to successfully implement SRP, both in terms of failure to support the Home Office and failure to implement the Council's publicly stated commitment to accept up to twenty Syrian refugee households. There is also risk to reputation with the Home office should the Council fail to support Serco in implementing Asylum Dispersal in the borough. The Council is working with relevant partners to ensure that both SRP and Asylum Dispersal is delivered successfully.

Health and Safety:

There are no health and safety implications arising from this report.

Sustainability:

Both SRP and Asylum Dispersal are long-term commitments and are intended to contribute towards community cohesion within the borough.

Community Safety:

SRP and Asylum Dispersal have potential to raise community safety issues. However, there is believed to be considerable goodwill within Pendle in supporting Syrian refugees and many local services are willing to provide support. In terms of Asylum Dispersal, the Council are able to veto properties where there is considered to be risk / community safety issues.

Equality and Diversity:

There are no equality and diversity issues arising from the contents of this report.

Appendices

None