

**REPORT OF: HOUSING, HEALTH AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
MANAGER**

**TO: EXECUTIVE**

**DATES: 8<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2016**

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## **SYRIAN RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMME (SRP) & ASYLUM SEEKER DISPERSAL IN PENDLE**

### **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To update Executive regarding the implementation of SRP and Asylum Seeker Dispersal in Pendle.
2. To agree a commitment for further families in 2017/18 - under SRP.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. To note developments in relation to the implementation of SRP and Asylum Seeker Dispersal in Pendle.
2. To agree to take a further 10 families under SRP in 2017/18 subject to being able to secure the necessary properties.

### **Syrian Refugee Program (SRP) in Pendle – Progress so far**

Further to report dated 25<sup>th</sup> August 2016, Pendle has now received ten Syrian families.

- Eight families arrived on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2016, with a further two families arriving on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2016
- All families moved into refurbished, furnished, terraced property in Nelson and Brierfield.
- A reception event was held for families at Silverman Hall on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2016. This was followed by an official 'Welcome To Pendle' Event on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2016, which was very well attended and provided the families with a very warm welcome to our borough.
- Families received intensive orientation support for the first two weeks following their arrival. This included provision of interpretation / translation support in helping to set up bank accounts, registration at doctors / dentist, ESOL enrolment, claims for relevant benefits, helping children enrol / attend school and supporting residents in getting to know Pendle.

- Following intensive orientation, caseworker support has been provided to families both during the day and on an out of hours basis.
- Support has also been provided in co-ordinating donations received and helping residents engage with the VCFS sector.
- Families will continue to receive caseworker floating support at a rate of one caseworker per five families until one year after arrival.

Whilst there have been many successes in achieving resettlement, unfortunately there were some unforeseen issues which needed to be addressed.

- Handover of properties was only achieved in some cases just three to four days before arrival of families. This had repercussions in terms of
  - Gas / electric - although no family was left without gas / electric, it was not possible to set up new accounts on time.
  - Furniture – all furniture for the ten properties was delivered on time, but in some isolated cases, deliveries to each property were not 100% accurate. Any issues with furniture was however resolved quickly
  - Minor disrepair outstanding, again resolved as quickly as possible once detected.
- One family had to move to another property following a major water pipe leak.

Delivering SRP in Pendle has proved hugely complex and whilst the process of delivering resettlement will continue to provide challenges, it is felt that on balance, SRP has been delivered effectively.

### **Decision on whether to commit to further resettlement of Syrian refugees in Pendle.**

It has been agreed that Lancashire accept its 'fair share' of the national commitment to accept 20,000 Syrian refugees. This has been calculated to be 500 refugees over 5 years, therefore 100 refugees (c30 families) a year will be resettled. Lancashire County Council (LCC) who are co-ordinating a sub-regional offer from all Lancashire authorities (inc BwD and Blackpool), wish to plan arrivals for the period 2017-20. In principle, Lancashire will resettle thirty families every year but there is flexibility around this target. The Council, along with all other Councils, is being asked to confirm numbers of refugees to be resettled and in which year. As caseworker support is provided on the ratio one worker per five households, resettlement commitments are expected to be offered in blocks of five ie Pendle would be expected to agree to accept refugees in block of five families at once.

In consideration of the Councils offer to accept twenty Syrian refugee families, it appears the Council have three options:-

#### **1) *Accept ten families in year 2 of SRP (provisional arrival June / July 2017 – so as to coincide with the new school year from Aug / Sept 2017)***

Accepting ten families in year 2 would be beneficial in terms of:-

- Continuity ie the Council, delivery partners, and VCFS have now gained substantial experience regarding the SRP process. Delivering SRP in year 2 would therefore be expected to be less problematic than delivering after a gap year.
- Meeting the Councils commitment to accept twenty families within a reasonable timeframe.
- Bringing ten empty properties back into use has hopefully had a positive impact on the community and contributes towards New Homes Bonus.
- Reclaiming of Council officer time – will bring in additional funding c£10k based on acceptance of 10 families.

#### *Risks:-*

- Property provision – although no decisions have been taken, securing ten suitable properties is perhaps more likely to be achievable whilst there remains a significant number of Rossendale BC properties being brought back into use over the next year.
- Loss of delivery partner(s) – whilst it is hoped that should the Council commit to accept ten families in year 2, that delivery partners will remain in place, there is a heightened risk to loss of delivery partner in the future should the Council not commit in year 2.
- There would be increased pressure on school places in the borough.

#### **2) *Accept five families in year 2 and five families in year 3***

Many of the benefits / risks of Option 1 remain, although delivered over an extended period. Whilst acceptance of less families all at once may lessen pressures on the Council and delivery partners, it would likely result in additional work as some processes would need to be delivered twice ie in year 2 and year 3.

#### **3) *Accept no families in year 2 but agree to accept ten families in the future***

The only known benefit to undertaking this approach may be in reducing pressure on school places in the short-term. However, there is no guarantee that delaying arrival of refugees will necessarily have such an impact as it's not known whether school places will come under even more pressure in the future, thus delaying arrivals could make the situation worse. Had the impact of Syrian families in the community been such that it may have manifested itself into community safety issues, there may be reason to delay acceptance of more families. However, there is no known evidence of such issues and therefore delay in acceptance of families is more likely to hinder successful future delivery, than not. Further, there is risk of perception that the Council have decided to withdraw the offer to accept twenty Syrian Refugee families into the borough.

#### **Recommendation**

Based on the above, it is proposed that the Council commit to accepting ten Syrian refugee families in year two.

#### **Asylum Seeker Dispersal in Pendle**

It was reported to the Executive on 25<sup>th</sup> August 2016 that the Council, along with all Lancashire authorities, had 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. Pendle are currently piloting this with an initial 5 properties and the process is being managed through Serco.

Since the last report Serco have notified the Council of potential properties they were interested in using for Asylum seeker dispersal. The Council conducted a '*Post Code Consultation*' to determine whether such properties selected were acceptable to be used. Following this process, the Council have since received a 'Property Acquisitions Briefing Paper' dated 10<sup>th</sup> November indicating on that date that three properties were being used to rehouse five asylum seeker families in Pendle. The two other properties selected were still at initial inspection.

The Council will not be advised specifically which properties are being used and / or the names of occupants. However, Serco have been requested to contact local VCFS organisations so that any asylum seekers that are rehoused in Pendle are able to access additional support whilst living here. To date, no families have since approached the Council for assistance following determination of their asylum seeker claim.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### **Policy**

There are no policy implications arising from this report.

### **Financial**

Bringing properties back into use via SRP may positively impact on New Homes Bonus. Under SRP, there will not be any cost to the Council but reimbursement for officer time may result in receipt of c£10k. The Council may be approached for assistance in rehousing successful asylum seeker claimants which could have an impact on Housing Needs budgets.

### **Legal**

Under SRP, a MoU has been in place between LCC and Pendle BC. The Council has also entered into a SLA with Calico Group, who are the delivery partner of support. It would be anticipated that similar arrangements would be made for future participation in this scheme. There are no known legal implications arising from Asylum Seeker dispersal in Pendle.

### **Risk Management**

There is risk to reputation should the Council fail to successfully implement SRP 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:**

SRP will result in some void properties being brought back into use, thus hopefully contributing towards sustainability of the areas where they are located. Further, successful delivery of SRP is intended to contribute towards community cohesion within the borough. 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. Following arrival of Syrian refugees in September 2016 and latterly Asylum Seekers, there has been no known community safety incidents reported.

### **Equality and Diversity:**

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

## **Appendices**

None