

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Cabinet **DATE:** 27th June 2016

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PART I KEY DECISION

REFUGEE DISPERSAL, RESETTLEMENT OF SYRIAN REFUGEES & UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM SEEKING CHILDREN

1 Purpose of Report

To update Members and seek approval on activity in response to the Governments request's that:

- refugee dispersal be widened
- support for the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS) is considered and
- support for the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) scheme be assessed

2 Recommendations

The Cabinet is requested to resolve:

- (a) That a specific and limited offer is made to support asylum seekers dispersal by permitting the Governments contractor to source and operate a single dwelling in Slough.
- (b) That a specific offer is made to support for the SVPR scheme by accepting up to 5 small families (with up to 2 children) over the next 4/5 years and that an Operational Group is established to facilitate the support.
- (c) That no offer is made to accept any children from the UASC scheme at this stage, until services for the most vulnerable children in the borough are in a more stable position. That delegated power be given to the Interim Director of Children's Services to agree in consultation with the Slough Children's Services Trust Ltd and others the extent of the councils future involvement in the UASC scheme.

3. The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan

The schemes are a Government intervention in response to an exceptional humanitarian crisis; the impacts to and of the Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan have been considered in depth during the internal and external assessment of Sloughs suitability & capacity to support the schemes. Due to the small numbers of asylum seekers and refugees likely to be supported by the recommendations impact is anticipated to be minimal; the recommendations are considered to be a manageable and reasonable response. It is anticipated however that engagement to develop and deliver support for asylum seekers and refugees is likely to enhance, strengthen and build upon the existing partnerships in in the town.

4 Other Implications

(a) Financial

There will be no costs associated with meeting the requirements of the Asylum Dispersal Scheme however; there may be additional demands upon existing services with providing housing for refugees when their status is confirmed and should they choose to remain in Slough.

There will be costs associated with meeting the requirements of the SVPR and the UASC schemes; whilst the Home Office will meet most of the costs during the first year for the SVPR scheme. It is anticipated that this funding will not cover all costs and there are likely to be ongoing costs in further years which may be offset by families being able to seek employment under the humanitarian visa arrangements. There will be a sliding scale for the remainder of the 5 years of Home Office support. It is anticipated that some costs will be offset by voluntary donations, as is the case in areas where SVPR families are already settled.

The level of financial support for UASC has been confirmed by the Home Office and as yet it is unclear whether this funding will fully meet needs.

(b) Risk Management

Risk	Mitigating action	Opportunities
Legal	Asylum seekers and refugees will have legal status and support provision will be in line with government processes and procedures	
Property	Accommodation will be sourced outside the usual pool of private rented accommodation	Asylum Dispersal Accommodation may be upgraded to meet needs at no cost to the council
Human Rights	Support will be in line with Home Office advice	Slough will be able to continue to play it's part in supporting refugees reflecting the long history of successful migration to the town

Health and Safety	No new risks are identified	
Employment Issues	Persons resettled under the SVPR scheme have the right to seek employment	Skilled resettled persons may enhance the employment pool and the Council will actively seek to match SVPR scheme refugees resettled in Slough to local employment opportunities
Equalities Issues	Translation and welcome orientation services will be required to support refugees. Provision of these already exists to ensure fair access to services.	Translation and other support services will be provided to Asylum Dispersal persons as part of the outsourced arrangements funded by the Home Office
Community Support	Considerable support for the scheme from the Community has already been demonstrated by the SVPR scheme T&F group members	Supporting the schemes will provide the opportunity for closer links to be developed between all partners supporting refugees including the voluntary and business sectors in Slough
Communications	A communications plan will be in place and experience from other areas on effective communications will be utilised. Care needs to be taken to respect the privacy of vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers	Communications provides and opportunity to confirm strong community cohesion in Slough
Community Safety	Full pre- arrival checks will be carried out on asylum seekers and SVPR schemes ahead of accommodation allocation	Fostering greater understanding of Syrian and other cultures to help enhance community cohesion
Financial	Please see financial section comments	
Timetable for delivery	1 to 5 years	Economies of scale may be achieved with the SVPR scheme by accepting the proposed 5 families in the next two years.
Project Capacity	Support from the Programme Management Office will be sought for implementation of the SVPR scheme	
Other		

Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

The individuals, families and children accepted for support via the schemes will have legal status and Home Office guidance will be followed.

Equalities Impact Assessment – there is no requirement for a separate Equalities Impact Assessment. Support for asylum seekers and refugees will follow government protocol. An assessment of any impact upon community cohesion was considered during the initial assessment process based upon a determination of the realistic support required. The numbers involved are small and capacity already exists re ensuring fair access to services (e.g translation services etc).

5 **Supporting Information**

Background

- 5.1 There is a growing demand for the UK to accept more refugees and asylum seekers and the Government has in place 3 separate schemes designed to build capacity across the country.; National Asylum Dispersal, Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation and more recently Unaccompanied Children.
- 5.1.2 Whilst the Home Office have powers to direct local authorities to support refugees and asylum seekers they have taken the preferred approach of using the Regional Strategic Partnerships for Migration to facilitate discussions. The council has actively engaged with the South East Strategic Partnership on Migration (SESPM) on considering Sloughs suitability to support the schemes and will continue to do so.
- 5.1.3 Slough has a long tradition of supporting refugees and of migration to the town and we have strong, established voluntary support networks for refugees. Current government data shows the number of refugees in the town is 31 on official subsistent support however, local information suggests there are many more who are not easily identifiable nor are currently recognised by the Home Office for support purposes. Slough supports a significant number of asylum seekers and refugees particularly in comparison to other Berkshire authorities. Comparable figures for asylum seekers/refugees in Windsor and Maidenhead are 3, Bracknell Forest 5, Wokingham 0, Reading 10 and West Berkshire 0.
- 5.1.4 It is acknowledged by the HO that Slough, like many other local authorities, has considerable pressure upon its housing stock, schools and services and that there may be valid reasons which impact upon Sloughs realistic ability to offer support or the extent of that support. Reasons for offers of support from Slough or otherwise will need be confirmed to the Home Office.

National Dispersal Scheme

- 5.2. Asylum seekers are people who are in the UK, have asked for asylum in the UK and are waiting for a decision on their claim. Initially asylum seekers are placed in short term, hostel style accommodation whilst they make their application to the Home Office. Once it is confirmed that they are eligible for support, asylum seekers are moved to more permanent dispersal accommodation for example a shared flat or house. The length of stay varies, and is typically 6 months if the asylum seekers claim is successful or longer to allow for appeals processes. If the asylum seekers claim is successful they are then known as a refugee and are issued with identity

documents, national insurance number and support to find permanent accommodation.

- 5.2.1 A national dispersal scheme has operated since 2000 with the establishment of dispersal areas in for example, Kent and Portsmouth. However these areas have now reach capacity and the HO is looking to establish dispersal areas in other regions including the Thames Valley.
- 5.2.2 Initial discussions with the HO have taken place supported by the SESPM. Under the national asylum dispersal scheme the Home Office provides, via a contractor, accommodation, subsistence and support service (e.g. advice and guidance) for eligible asylum seekers while their applications for asylum are being processed. It is proposed that the contractor for the Thames Valley, Clearspring, is granted permission to source suitable accommodation in Slough to support asylum seekers under the dispersal scheme and this would be a single property for up to five young men at any one time.
- 5.2.3 The council would receive no financial support from the HO for participating in the Dispersal scheme; however the council together with the Police can veto the use of any of the proposed accommodation based on the suitability or not of its location.
- 5.2.4 Refugees moving on from the proposed dispersal accommodation in Slough may decide to remain in the area in which case they will be eligible for housing advice and support subject to the council's agreed criteria.
- 5.2.5 The considered offer from Slough is reasonable and realistic given the limited impact upon the town and local services from the proposal and will be subject to review.

5.3 Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme

- 5.3.1 The Prime Minister announced in September 2015 that Britain should resettle up to 20,000 Syrian refugees over the remainder of the Parliament with an extension of the existing Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme. The scheme specifically relates to vulnerable people from the Syrian regions that are currently in emergency accommodation in adjacent countries such as Jordan and Turkey and forms part of the UK's response to the humanitarian crisis.
- 5.3.2. All local authorities are being asked on a voluntary basis to assess the number and type of individuals that they might be able to accommodate under the scheme. It is important that any assessment by the local authority involves key partners: Slough Children's Services Trust, the CCG and other health partners, Police, schools, the voluntary sector and others. The expectations upon local authorities and/or delivery partners are set out in a Home Office 'Statement of Requirements'.
- 5.3.3. No local authorities will be asked by the Home Office to take more that the local structures are able to cope with and the Home Office has also undertaken to work with local authorities and partners to ensure that where capacity is identified that the impact is managed in a fair and controlled way. In the South East the response is being coordinated by the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration with which the council is liaising with closely.
- 5.3.4. Local authorities that agree to participate in the scheme can specify their preference regarding the size and characteristics of a refugee household that they may be able

to accommodate. The council carried a detailed internal assessment of potential capacity and the likely impacts on the town. A subsequent task & finish group was established in March 2016 to carry out a wider strategic assessment of capacity/impacts in Slough which consisted of council teams, Slough Police, representatives from the voluntary sector and the Slough Children's Services Trust Ltd. The recommendation from the group was for the council to make an offer to the Home office to accept up to five small families with a maximum of 2 children each over a 5 year period.

- 5.3.5 The remaining Berkshire Authorities have agreed to make similar offers to the Home Office and there are currently Syrian Families settled in West Berkshire, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead as well as Oxford and High Wycombe.
- 5.3.6. Should the SVPR scheme recommendation be endorsed than an Operational Group would be established lead by the councils Adult Social Care Team to finalise an offer and make preparations for arrival and welcome of families once suitable accommodation has been secured.

5.4 Unaccompanied Children's Scheme

- 5.4.1. The Government wrote to authorities on 13 May with information on the future resettlement scheme for unaccompanied children, which will include the resettlement of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC), children deemed at risk from countries around Syria and children from other European countries into the UK. The scheme also seeks to transfer UAS children already in placements in the UK, in areas such as Kent, which are experiencing considerable demand upon their services with a very high number of UAS children.
- 5.4.2 The new scheme will be based on each region being asked to take a proportion of UAS children in relation to their current looked after child population, with no region expected to accept a ration in excess of 0.07. The Government is currently developing a protocol and statutory guidance to inform the transfer process.
- 5.4.3 Slough's position on contributing to the UASC scheme will continue to be informed through consultation with The Slough Children's Services Trust Ltd and others. At present it is recommended that no offer is made in relation to UAS children until services for the most vulnerable children in the borough are in a more stable position.

6 Comments of Other Committees

- 6.1 There are no other comments from other committees at this stage.

7 Conclusion

The Governments commitment to supporting more and wider dispersal of asylum seekers, and re-settlement of vulnerable Syrian families and unaccompanied children impacts on all local authorities and the pressure to provide a response to the Home Office request for support will continue. The proposal for dispersal accommodation in Slough is reasonable and Cabinet is asked to approve the recommendations.

8 Background Papers

- 1. Local Government Association - <http://www.local.gov.uk/refugees>