

## **SOUTH EAST ENGLAND COUNCILS EXECUTIVE MEETING**



Date: 22 March 2016

Subject: South East role in resettling Syrian refugees

Report of: Heather Bolton, SEEC Director and Roy Millard, South East Strategic Partnership for Migration

### **Recommendations:**

Members are asked to:

- i) Take the opportunity to discuss current issues and pressures around Syrian refugees with CLG/ Home Office/ DFID Minister Richard Harrington MP
- ii) Consider any follow up actions required.

### **1. Richard Harrington MP**

1.1 SEEC is pleased to welcome Richard Harrington MP to speak to Executive members. Richard has been Conservative MP for Watford since 2010. He took up his post as Minister for resettlement of Syrian refugees in September 2015, in a joint appointment by the Home Office, CLG and DFID. Before entering Parliament he worked at the John Lewis Partnership, then established his own businesses in the property and holiday sectors.

### **2. Syrian refugee resettlement**

- 2.1 In September 2015 Prime Minister David Cameron pledged that the UK would resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020. Refugees will have leave to remain for at least five years.
- 2.2 A target of resettling 1,000 refugees nationally before Christmas was met, and work is now underway to resettle a further 19,000 by 2020. Richard Harrington has been a strong advocate for the essential role of local authorities in successful resettlement. He reinforced this at a workshop for South East councils on 21 December.
- 2.3 Local authorities accepting refugees will receive Government funding for five years to cover resettlement costs. An initial payment of £8,520 per person will be made in the first year, with funding reducing in subsequent years to reflect increasing integration of refugees and the aim that refugees will move into employment.

### **3. The South East position**

- 3.1 A number of South East councils received refugees before Christmas, with 71 people resettled across nine authorities. To date, 30 South East authorities have provisionally offered a further 2,200 places by 2020. This is some 13% of the expected total of Syrian refugees, broadly in line with the South East's share of the UK-wide population.
- 3.2 Responding to a Home Office request, SESPM and SEEC have consulted councils and submitted proposals for helping match refugees to South East authorities with suitable accommodation. Subject to Home Office approval, matching would begin during 2016.
- 3.3 Richard Harrington has been particularly keen to encourage South East authorities to participate in resettlement as he wants to maximise potential for refugees to take advantage of employment opportunities in our strong economy.
- 3.4 SEEC members have highlighted a number of areas where Ministerial assistance could help turn provisional offers into firm places of refugees:
  - Help with information on refugees' skills so they can be placed in areas with suitable job opportunities.
  - Top up funding to help cover the high cost of rented accommodation in the South East.
  - Greater certainty on 5-year funding for refugees arriving later in the Parliament – for example will funding be available in the next Spending Review period from 2020?
  - How Syrian resettlement relates to wider asylum? In 2015, before the Syrian programme, several South East councils were contacted about becoming asylum dispersal areas but are now unclear how this will develop. This month a wider group of councils have received Home Office letters about participating in asylum dispersal.