



Member briefing: Syrian refugee relocation September 2015

1. The Government's commitment

- 1.1 On 7 September 2015 the Prime Minister announced that the UK will resettle up to 20,000 Syrian refugees during this Parliament. Richard Harrington (Home Office) is lead Minister.
- 1.2 The Government plans to expand an existing Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS), previously announced in February 2014. This provided 12 months' funding for local authorities who received Syrian refugees. By June 2015 some 216 people had been supported by this scheme.
- 1.3 Success in meeting the Government's offer of 20,000 places depends on the commitment of local authorities throughout the UK.

2. Refugees & timings

- 2.1 Refugees accepted by the UK will be high needs cases – ie people whose needs cannot be effectively supported in their region of origin. Unaccompanied children and orphans are included but it is considered that these will be very low in number. Selection will be undertaken with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).
- 2.2 Mass arrivals are not envisaged but a steady stream of arrivals is expected through charter flights. People will be granted 5 year 'humanitarian leave' to stay in the UK and **will** have recourse to public funds.
- 2.3 Arrival rates will need to increase from 20-30 a month to 400 a month by the end of October.

3. Funding & support

- 3.1 Local authorities will receive funding from central Government to cover the cost of supporting Syrian refugees. The funding will come from the UK's international aid budget.
- 3.2 Details of the updated, expanded SVPRS scheme had not been published at the time of writing (22 September 2015). If based on the 2014 scheme, it is expected costs would be covered for 12 months, to include:
 - meet and greet from the airport
 - housing costs at Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates, including up to 2-month void accommodation costs to allow forward planning of refugee accommodation needs
 - housing adaptations & furniture
 - a one-off cash allowance ahead of receipt of mainstream benefits
 - funding for health & education, a one-off social care supplement and integration support.
- 3.3 There are concerns in the South East and beyond that significant costs to councils will extend past 12 months. The LGA is therefore calling on Government to recognise the long-term nature of resettling Syrian refugees in communities by providing a firm commitment that funding to councils will reflect this. They argue it is important to ensure vulnerable children, families and adults have access to the public services they will need and will not be seen as a burden by the communities who will be welcoming them.

4. The local authority role

- 4.1 Local authorities UK-wide are currently being asked to estimate the numbers of individuals they can accommodate. In the South East these numbers are being collated by Roy Millard at the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM) to help the Home Office scope an arrivals plan. Contact Roy on roymillard@secouncils.gov.uk
- 4.2 The Home Office has asked authorities to be as specific as possible in preferences – eg families/single people – so they can match pledges with refugees as effectively as possible.

- 4.3 In 2-tier areas of the South East, evidence shows that districts are agreeing offers (often based on housing availability) internally then liaising with county councils on issues such as social care and education. The Home Office have expressed no preference for which tier leads discussions, but expect local authorities to agree this behind the scenes before making pledges.
- 4.4 Accommodation costs will be paid at Local Housing Allowance rates. In most of the South East housing is being considered in the private rented sector, although some authorities are not ruling out social housing in extremis.
- 4.5 Offers of help from the general public and co-ordinated charity action are being centrally collated for consideration. The Home Office has asked that each authority record any offers of accommodation they receive.

5. South East responses

- 5.1 At the time of writing (22 September 2015), SESPM is aware of in-principle pledges from 6 South East authorities, equating to circa 150 people per year. This is across a mixture of 2-tier and unitary authorities.
- 5.2 Positive responses have also been received from a further 15 South East authorities who are yet to work out the details of their in-principle offer.

6. More information

- 6.1 SESPM is sending regular updates to South East local authority Chief Executives/ Managing Directors and nominated officers. SESPM Manager Roy Millard will be pleased to attend any internal local authority meetings (subject to availability). Contact Roy via:
Email: roymillard@secouncils.gov.uk
Phone: 01304 872186 or 07881 521092.
- 6.2 The LGA have added a [regularly updated page on refugees to their website](#) and have offered to assist with media enquiries.
- 6.3 The Home Office are also publishing [regular updates on their website](#).