

Member briefing: Syrian refugee update April 2016

1. Government commitment to Syrian refugees

- 1.1 In September 2015, the Government committed to resettling up to 20,000 Syrian refugees in the UK during this Parliament. To achieve this Ministers have expanded an existing (2014) Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS). Richard Harrington (Home Office, CLG and DFID) is the lead Minister.
- 1.2 Success in meeting the Government's offer of 20,000 refugee places depends on the commitment of local authorities throughout the UK to make 'pledges' to accept refugees. Delivery of the expanded SVPRS has two stages:
 - Phase One: This was successfully delivered with 1,000+ people resettled by Christmas 2015
 - Phase Two: will run for the rest of the lifetime of this Parliament.
- 1.3 Selection of refugees coming to the UK will be undertaken with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Around 80% of refugee cases are expected to be straight forward and 20% will have complex needs, such as severe medical needs. Each area of the UK will be required to accept all cases referred to it.
- 1.4 People resettled under SVPRS will receive 'Humanitarian Protection' leave to stay for 5 years. They will have full recourse to public funds, will be entitled to work and access services in the UK. This type of leave to stay makes it possible for people to return to Syria – eg to assist with rebuilding – or can be extended as a pathway to permanent settlement in the UK.

2. South East local authority responses

- 2.1 **Phase One:** Between September and Christmas 2015, 72 people arrived across 9 local authorities in the South East. By April 2016 this had risen to 123 people while detailed planning for Phase Two is undertaken.
- 2.2 **Phase Two:** 56 South East authorities have now pledged an impressive 3,000 places - the highest number in any area of England. In response to this, Richard Harrington thanked South East councils for their support when he attended the SEEC Executive Meeting in March.
- 2.3 The Home Office have confirmed that Phase Two will operate by regional coordination and matching. In the South East this will be managed by the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM) and SEEC. We aim to match refugees with councils who have accommodation and support facilities that can meet the refugees' needs. We are currently working on finalising arrangements with the Home Office to do this with oversight from the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) and officer representation on existing South East governance structures. We also hope to work with the Home Office to identify refugees' skills and experience of life in rural or urban settings to help direct them to appropriate areas, in particular to locations with suitable job opportunities.
- 2.4 **Future arrivals:** The Home Office will organise regular quarterly charter flights of 125 people (approx. 25 families) to the South East. We now need to work with South East local authorities to establish a regular pipeline for each quarterly arrival.
- 2.5 The first charter flight arrival will be shared between the South East and East of England at the end of June 2016, so we will need to place half these people (approx. 12 families) in South East authorities. Regular dedicated South East charter flights of 125 people (approx. 25 families) every quarter are expected to begin from September 2016. SESPM Manager Roy Millard is contacting authorities to scope out the feasibility of the quarterly pipe line of arrivals and to understand councils' requirements for the South East coordination and matching service. Please contact Roy directly (details below) if you are able to offer places. CLG have particularly asked us to identify any councils with large accommodation available (4+ bedrooms) or accessible homes.

3. Funding

- 3.1 **First year funding:** Government's per capita funding to cover the costs of refugees for the first 12 months is shown in table A below. Costs have been drawn from other resettlement schemes operating in the UK. Funding will cover local authority costs including management of the scheme, housing procurement and any necessary void periods, cultural integration such as English language provision and social care. Councils can claim 40% on refugee arrival, followed by 30% at the end of month 4 and 30% at the end of month 8. Separate amounts are specified for education and there will be direct payments to Clinical Commissioning Groups and DWP for health and benefits. There is also a hardship fund to cover additional costs for refugees with special needs. Details of this fund are being developed but are expected to cover adaptations and/ or extra health needs.

Table A: Agreed first year funding for refugees under the SVPRS

UNIT COST FOR SYRIAN VPR SCHEME – YEAR 1					
	Adult Benefit Claimant	Other Adults	Children 5-18	Children 3-4	Children U-3
Local authority costs	8,520	8,520	8,520	8,520	8,520
Education	0	0	4,500	2,250	0
Special Educational Needs	0	0	1,000	1,000	0
DWP benefits	12,700	0	0	0	0
Primary medical care	600	600	600	600	600
Secondary medical care	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000
TOTALS	£23,820	£11,120	£16,620	£14,370	£11,120

- 3.2 Housing costs in the South East are the most frequently cited barrier to greater local authority participation in resettling refugees as there is limited accommodation available at local housing allowance (LHA) rates. Although these refugees are entitled to public funds there is often a gap between LHA and market rents.
- 3.3 **Funding for years two to five:** Councils can claim per capita funding for refugees on a sliding scale in years two to five. Funding will reduce as families become more integrated over time and move into employment. The sliding scale is: Year 2 £5,000; year 3 £3,700; year 4 £2,300; year 5 £1,000.

4. Security checks

- 4.1 When refugees arrive in the UK they will have been through a thorough two-stage vetting process.
- 4.2 The Home Office takes security extremely seriously in cases referred to them for resettlement and works closely with the UNHCR who have their own robust identification processes in place. This includes checking biometrics, documentary evidence, interviewing potential refugees and screening for infectious diseases.
- 4.3 Potential refugees are also screened and considered by the Home Office for suitability to enter the UK. This includes further checking of biometric data. The Home Office retains the right to reject individuals on security, war crimes or other grounds, including where there is insufficient information to undertake effective screening.

5. More information

- 5.1 SESPM sends 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.