



Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council

FORWARD TIMETABLE OF CONSULTATION AND DECISION MAKING

COUNCIL

22 FEBRUARY 2018

WARDS AFFECTED: ALL WARDS

SYRIAN VULNERABLE PERSONS RESETTLEMENT SCHEME

Report of Director (Community Services)

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- To inform Members of the progress of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme
- To outline the issues with sourcing homes in the private rented sector
- To suggest options for accommodating future families coming into the Borough

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That Council approves the use of 2 social/affordable properties per year for the next 4 years to meet the commitment to the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS) where accommodation in the private sector is not available.

3. BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

- 3.1 At Council on 12 April 2016 Members agreed that Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council would participate in the SVPRS. This commits the Council to providing accommodation in the private rented sector for 2 families per year, over 5 years, up to a total of 50 people. The families are currently residing in countries surrounding Syria and the programme is to relieve the pressure on those countries and provide a safe home for people displaced by the war in Syria. Home Office funding supports the families with accessing support services, translation services, accessing ESOL lessons and providing furniture and other costs to start up the family in their new life. This is arranged and administered on behalf of the Leicestershire District authorities by Charnwood Borough Council. Rent costs will be met by Housing Benefit up to Local Housing Allowance rates.

- 3.2 Council agreed to Syrian families being accommodated in the private rented sector. Accessing housing in the private rented sector has proved problematical. This is for a number of reasons, including, but not restricted to,
- High demand for the private rented sector means landlords can be very selective on who they will accept and prefer working tenants
 - Changes to buy to rent mortgages mean that many landlords cannot accept benefit claimants under their mortgage terms
 - There is a significant shortfall between Local Housing Allowance rates and the rent levels expected by private landlords
 - Rising property prices mean many landlords who were renting their second property have now been able to sell up and withdraw from the rental market
 - Cautionary reports on rising arrears levels due to the introduction of Universal Credit have made landlords reluctant to rent to benefit claimants.
- 3.3 In the period preceding the expected arrival dates for flights into the UK in March and September 2017, 20 lettings agents who advertise properties in the Hinckley and Bosworth area were approached both as a general enquiry and in response to specific advertisements. None of these discussions led to any property being located for the programme. This experience is echoed in other local authorities throughout the Midlands, where successful housing has predominantly been sourced through the affordable housing sector.
- 3.4 Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council run a modest Private Sector Housing scheme of 7 properties. A three bedroomed house and a two bedroomed house in the Private Sector Housing Scheme have recently become vacant and have enabled the Council to meet its obligation to house 2 families in 2017, with a flight arriving in early December. However this does not provide a reliable solution going forward.
- 3.5 It has therefore become clear that if the Council is to meet its obligations to the SVPRS over the next 4 years, it will be necessary to seek alternative solutions to the private rented sector for use for the SVPRS. Possible alternatives include:
- Use of council housing for the 2 families each year who will be housed in the Borough.
 - Use of properties owned by Registered Providers (housing associations). This has proved successful in some local authority areas, where Registered Providers have some private rented stock as well as affordable housing. Registered Providers active in Hinckley and Bosworth advertise all of their vacancies through Hinckley and Bosworth's Choice Based Lettings scheme, and do not have private rented houses in the Borough that can help with the SVPRS.
 - Purchase of properties on the open market by an interest group for use in the SVPRS. This option has been investigated with Green Pastures, a Christian organisation who would buy properties and lease them back to the council, and with a private individual who is working with a volunteer refugee support group, but neither initiative has been successful. The timing of any purchase is difficult to coordinate with the arrivals schedules.
 - Withdrawal from the SVPRS scheme in future years due to the lack of suitable available accommodation.
- 3.6 The preferred option remains the use of private rented sector properties for housing families under the SVPRS programme. However where this is not possible, the second option is use of social/affordable housing for the resettlement of the Syrian families, either a council property or a Registered Provider property. As the

programme is resettling families, the number of vacancies occurring for 2, 3 and 4 bed roomed houses over the last 3 years has been investigated and is as follows:

	2 bed house	3 bed house	4 bed house	Total voids
1/4/2014 – 31/3/2015	160	139	8	307
1/4/2015 – 31/3/2016	110	96	8	214
1/4/2016 – 31/3/2017	113	68	2	183

3.6 Whilst the Council does not wish to disadvantage current home seekers on the Council waiting lists, over the last 3 years the allocation of 2 family houses per year for Syrian refugees would equate to less than 2% of the total turnover of family houses. Furthermore, the intention to house Syrian families in the urban areas of the Borough would not disadvantage applicants for rural schemes where family houses are fewer and turnover of properties is much lower. As previously mentioned other Districts have worked with their Registered Provider partners to secure accommodation and this option will be explored should the use of affordable/social housing be agreed.

3.7 Families housed in affordable housing under this scheme will be granted the same tenancy terms and conditions as any other tenant. For council homes, at present this will mean a one year introductory tenancy followed by a secure tenancy if the conduct of the tenancy is satisfactory. Should the council introduce fixed term tenancies, the tenants will be offered an introductory tenancy followed by a 4 year fixed term tenancy.

4. EXEMPTIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE ACCESS TO INFORMATION PROCEDURE RULES

4.1 This report will be taken in public session.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS [IB]

5.1 Officers will seek to find privately rented properties for the scheme.

5.2 If no privately rented properties are available Council accommodation will be offered. The rental cost for the accommodation will be covered by Housing Benefits up to the local housing allowance rate. Therefore there is a potential for a small deficit on rents but this is expected to be minimal (less than £550 annually per property)

5.3 Home Office funding, passported through Charnwood Borough Council supports the families with accessing support services, translation services, accessing ESOL lessons and providing furniture and other costs to start up the family in their new life. Potential costs and associated income from Charnwood Borough Council has already been budgeted for (£130,000 in 2017/18 and £50,000 in 2018/19). Therefore there no overall impact on the general fund

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS [AR]

6.1 Participation in the scheme remains voluntary and there is not a statutory duty to offer accommodation to Syrian families, however in participating in the scheme the

Council is able to exercise its power in accordance with the General Power of Competence under s.1 of the Localism Act 2011. The Council will be exercising a public function and will therefore also be subject to s149 of the Equalities Act 2010.

6.2 The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defines a Refugee as:
 “A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”

6.3 Individuals arriving in the UK through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme Selection will have been granted refugee status by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in advance of arriving in the UK. They will be granted 5 year ‘humanitarian leave’ to stay in the UK and access to public funds, access to the labour market and the possibility of a family reunion.

7. CORPORATE PLAN IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Contributes to the Corporate Plan priority of supporting vulnerable people and those who are most in need.

8. CONSULTATION

8.1 Registered Providers operating in the Borough, volunteer groups working with refugees and local lettings agents have all been contacted in respect of the proposed housing of families under the SVPRS.

9. RISK IMPLICATIONS

9.1 It is the Council’s policy to proactively identify and manage significant risks which may prevent delivery of business objectives.

9.2 It is not possible to eliminate or manage all risks all of the time and risks will remain which have not been identified. However, it is the officer’s opinion based on the information available, that the significant risks associated with this decision / project have been identified, assessed and that controls are in place to manage them effectively.

9.3 The following significant risks associated with this report / decisions were identified from this assessment:

Management of significant (Net Red) Risks		
Risk Description	Mitigating actions	Owner
Unable to identify suitable properties means the council cannot meet its obligations to the SVPRS programme	Proactive identification of alternative options to the private rented sector	Sharon Stacey
Disadvantage to residents on the council’s waiting list	Opportunities in the private sector will continue to be pursued. Council housing will be provided in urban	Sharon Stacey

	settlements where there is a greater supply of affordable homes.	
Withdrawal from the SVPRS programme may reflect reputationally on the Council's commitment to help vulnerable families	Evidence of the Council's attempts to secure alternative accommodation is documented and submitted to the Home Office as part of its reason to withdraw from the programme.	Sharon Stacey

10. KNOWING YOUR COMMUNITY – EQUALITY AND RURAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The SRVPS scheme is to help vulnerable people and therefore high levels of support will be offered to help the families settle into their new homes and feel safe and part of the community.

11. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

11.1 By submitting this report, the report author has taken the following into account:

- Community Safety implications
- Environmental implications
- ICT implications
- Asset Management implications
- Procurement implications
- Human Resources implications
- Planning implications
- Data Protection implications
- Voluntary Sector

Background papers: Council – 12 April 2016

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