

Scrutiny Committee

Meeting to be held on 26 February 2016

Electoral Division affected: All

Syrian Resettlement Programme

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Executive Summary

The Government has expanded the resettlement programme for Syrian refugees with a view to resettle up to 20,000 refugees over the 5 years of this Parliament. From April 2016 the Home Office will be looking for regional or sub-regional agreements. Lancashire County Council has been holding conversations with districts and Unitary Authorities with a view to formulating a Lancashire offer. Lancashire Chief Executives Group agreed on 15 January 2016 a proposal to resettle up to 500 refugees over 5 years, with Lancashire County Council taking the Lead Authority role

Recommendation

Scrutiny Committee are recommended to note this report, and, in particular, that:

1. Lancashire County Council will work with the other 14 Local Authorities in Lancashire, Clinical Commissioning Groups and other partners to resettle up to 500 Syrian refugees in Lancashire over 5 years, under the Syrian Resettlement Programme.
2. The Syrian Resettlement Programme will be fully funded by central Government, with Local Authorities incurring no net costs.
3. The Lancashire offer will be delivered in clusters, with only a handful of Local Authorities participating in each year of the Programme.
4. Lancashire County Council will take the role of Lead Authority and will coordinate the Programme across Lancashire. All resources required for that role will be fully funded by the Government.

Background and Advice

The Syrian Resettlement Programme (formerly the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme) has been expanded by the Home Office with a view to resettle up to 20,000 Syrian refugees over 5 years. The Home Office has been inviting individual Local Authorities to take refugees since October 2015. Some districts in Lancashire have agreed in principle to join the Programme, and Lancashire County Council has also indicated that it is prepared to support it. However, from April 2016 the Home Office will be looking at regional or sub-regional approaches rather than working with individual local authorities.

The county council has conducted discussions with district councils, unitary authorities and the North West Regional Strategic Migration Partnership (which, alongside similar partnerships in other regions, is coordinating a North West response) about the development of a Lancashire offer to the Syrian Resettlement Programme. Lancashire Chief Executives Group met on 15 January 2016 and agreed:

1. That Lancashire will take in its 'fair share' of refugees, up to 500 over five years (meaning around 30 properties or families a year).
2. That Lancashire County Council takes the role of Lead Authority in negotiations with the North West Regional Strategic Migration Partnership and the Home Office.

Lancashire's position has been formally articulated to the Home Office by the North West Regional Strategic Migration Partnership in the context of a wider North West commitment.

The Syrian Resettlement Programme is fully funded by central Government. The headline figures regarding this funding were published in the *Spending Review and Autumn Statement 2015*. The Home Office has recently released a 'funding instruction' with additional details about the funding that is available to Local Authorities. This specifies the following key points (applicable to year 1 of resettlement – Syrian refugees are granted leave to remain for 5 years initially):

1. Funding for Local Authorities will be at a standard per capita rate (or tariff), £8,520 per refugee. There are additional moneys for children aged 3-4 (£2,250) and children 5-18 (£4,500).
2. There is an additional payment of £1,000 (per child) for children with Special Educational Needs aged 3-18.
3. Further payments to cover social care may be paid on a case-by-case basis following relevant assessments, through an Exceptional Cases Fund.
4. Additional payments for educational purposes may be made as required in respect of supported young people (under 18s) in full time education, although further clarity is needed about this.
5. Payments will be structured throughout the year, with 22% paid on the day of arrival of refugees in the UK, followed by six equal payments every two months.

There are additional payments for health care (£600 and £2,000 respectively both primary and secondary care, paid separately to NHS organisations). There will also be additional payments for years 2 to 5 of resettlement (of each refugee) on a sliding scale from £5,000 in Year 2 to £1,000 in year 5 (per capita) for Local Authorities; however, there is little clarity about how this additional funding will be used and what it will cover, and the Department for Communities and Local Government are currently tasked with identifying a funding model to apply beyond Year 1.

Syrian refugees arriving under Syrian Resettlement Programme have access to mainstream benefits (including Housing Benefit/Local Housing Allowance) and are entitled to work. Benefits are paid separately from the Local Authority tariff. It is expected that many will have complex health care and social care needs. The Local Authority tariff is expected to be used to deliver a number of outcomes, including sourcing and preparing properties to house refugees, 'meet and greet' at the regional airport, orientation and integration services, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) tuition, and educational support for children.

About two-thirds of Local Authorities in Lancashire have committed to *indicative* numbers of families/properties to the Programme. In order to prevent/minimise the social isolation of Syrian refugees, and to deliver the expected outcomes more efficiently and effectively, all Local Authorities in Lancashire agreed that the Programme will be delivered in clusters. That means that only a handful of District Councils or Unitary Authorities will deliver the Programme each year. Subject to further consultation, the proposed clusters for the first year of the Programme in Lancashire are as follows:

- Blackpool – 10 properties/families
- Pendle – 10 properties/families
- Preston – 5 properties/families
- South Ribble – 5 properties/families

Lancashire County Council will be setting up an operational working group in the next few weeks to look at the logistics and model of delivery within the Lancashire footprint, to plan timescales for first arrivals and to build preparedness among partners. The working group will initially consist of representatives of Local Authorities, Clinical Commissioning Groups, Constabulary, among others. It is envisaged that the voluntary, community and faith Sector will also play a key role in developing our strategy and delivery model. Lancashire County Council has engaged with key stakeholders in the voluntary, community and faith sectors, and this process will continue and expand in the coming weeks and months. The operational working group will meet in March 2016 and it is expected that a delivery model will be agreed by the end of April 2016, including details of how the funding will work in practice. In any case, it is not expected at this stage that Lancashire will see any arrivals before the summer of 2016.

By supporting the Syrian Resettlement Programme, Lancashire County Council and other Local Authorities in Lancashire are making a considerable moral and material contribution to tackling the refugee crisis and assisting some of the most vulnerable persons in the world today.

Consultations

N/A

Implications:

N/A

Risk management

If Lancashire County Council does not support the Lancashire position regarding the Syrian Resettlement Programme, there is a risk that Lancashire will be left out of the programme or, at the very least, that Lancashire County Council will have no say on how the Programme will be delivered in Lancashire. This could have negative implications for the County Council, as it is expected that some of our services will be the most impacted by the Programme.

Financial

As the Syrian Resettlement Programme is fully funded by central Government, it is not expected that the County Council will incur any net costs as a result. All resources required to coordinate the Programme (including project management, business support, finance, commissioning, and procurement) will be fully funded externally, and that includes officer time. In addition to this, any services that Lancashire County Council may deliver directly as part of the Programme (e.g. ESOL, educational support, social care) will also be fully funded.

However, because of the way the payments are structured and the nature of some of the services (pre-arrival), there may be some financial implications in terms of advance monies/budget. Discussions are currently being held to determine the best way to manage this.

Personnel

There may be some implications regarding human resources, but until the Syrian Resettlement Programme Working Group agrees a delivery model it is difficult to anticipate which ones they will be. The County Council's Human Resources team has been made aware of this Programme and potential implications (e.g. potential need for additional staff capacity), and additional discussions will take place once we have more clarity about the way the Programme will be delivered.

Procurement

It is almost certain that, as the Lead Authority, and the recipient of the funding, the County Council will be commissioning a range of services to deliver the Programme. It is fully expected that normal procurement procedures will apply. As with any resource that will be required to coordinate the Programme, all commissioning and procurement resources, including officer time, will be charged against the funding grant.