

**From:** Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education

Matt Dunkley CBE, Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education

**To:** Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee - 1 October 2019

**Subject:** Refugee Resettlement Support Commissioning

**Decision No:** 19/00070

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Past Pathway of Paper:** Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme Steering Group

**Future Pathway of Paper:** None

**Electoral Division:** All

**Summary:** This report concerns proposals to externally commission the majority of the resettlement support (including the property set-up elements) of refugee resettlement in Kent.

**Recommendation(s):**

The Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education on the proposed decision to:

- (i) Commission via a competitive tender the refugee resettlement support service in Kent; and
- (ii) To delegate decisions about the commissioning process and the implementation of the new contracts to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education.

**1. Introduction**

1.1 This report concerns proposals to externally commission the majority of the resettlement support (including the property set-up elements) of refugee resettlement in Kent.

1.2 The current refugee resettlement scheme in Kent is solely focused on the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS). However, it is the intention to include in the tender the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (almost identical to the VPRS) for arrivals up to Spring 2020 and from then the new UK Resettlement Scheme which will absorb and extend the existing resettlement schemes going forward (see the attached Home Office Note for Local Authorities

on the UK Resettlement Scheme for details). Any future similarly organised and funded schemes will also be covered by the tender.

## **2. Background**

2.1 The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS) and the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) are both part of the UK Government's humanitarian relief programme supporting refugees where it has been determined that resettlement is in their best interests.

- The Syrian VPRS was launched in January 2014. In September 2015 it was announced that the scheme would be expanded to resettle 20,000 Syrians by mid-2020 and in July 2017 eligibility was extended to all those refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria, regardless of their nationality. The scheme involves taking particularly vulnerable refugees straight from the countries surrounding Syria and resettling them in the UK.
- On 21 April 2016, the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) was announced. VCRS has been specifically tailored to resettle vulnerable refugee children at risk and their families from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The target for this scheme is to resettle 3,000 individuals by mid-2020 (the target refers to both the children and their families).

2.2 Both schemes involve resettling the person identified as vulnerable with their immediate family. The individuals arriving under the scheme are given 5 years Refugee status from day one and, as such, are able to work, rent, claim benefits and other public funds immediately.

2.3 Housing authorities in the UK (in Kent the district/borough/city councils) are responsible for decisions on the number of refugee families to be resettled in their area and for the housing to be used. Nothing in this paper proposes any changes to that position.

2.4 Following the Government's request to local authorities (in September 2015) to resettle Syrian refugees under the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme, it was agreed with the Kent housing authorities that Kent County Council would coordinate the support provision for the refugees, with the exception of those to be settled in Ashford and Canterbury.

2.5 In order to respond in a timely manner to the need to resettle refugee families, KCC entered into agreements with providers that we were already working with and/or were aware of and that were able to provide the required support. The support providers are paid using a Grant agreement. It was always the intention to eventually formally commission the support elements of the scheme.

2.6 In August 2018 the responsibility for the scheme and the associated budget was transferred to the Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance division within Strategic and Corporate Services and new posts of Refugee Resettlement Programme Manager and Programme Support Officer were created from October 2018. This team already held some of the coordination and partnership responsibilities associated with the scheme.



4.3 The default position is for the Government funding to be provided to the responsible district housing authorities but within Kent this is now administered and managed by KCC on their behalf (with the agreement of the districts). There is no call on KCC or district main budgets and to date (since the beginning of the scheme in Kent in December 2015) spending on the scheme has not exceeded the available funds. It appears in the KCC Budget as a “net nil” budget.

## **5. Kent Policy Framework**

5.1 The proposed decision will enable KCC to deliver support to resettled refugee families in Kent in a way that meets the objectives of each of the three strategic outcomes in the Council’s Strategic Statement (2015-2020).

**Outcome 1** – Children and young people in Kent get the best start in life: almost all the families resettled through the scheme contain children and young people. They have all had to flee their country of origin following the witnessing of traumatic events. They have usually spent a few years in one of the countries surrounding Syria living an insecure existence where access to education, health care and other services is poor. Settling in Kent enables children and young people to have their needs fully assessed and addressed where at all possible, thus enabling them to dramatically improve their life chances.

**Outcome 2** – Kent communities feel the benefits of economic growth by being in work, healthy and enjoying a good quality of life: a fundamental objective of the scheme is to enable all adults for whom it is appropriate, to access full-time employment and to eventually not require support from the benefits system. To this end the scheme supports English language and skills training to enable individual refugees to secure employment. The support is very tailored to individual needs as the cohort of refugees arrive with very varied levels of education, qualifications and skills (e.g. there are craftsmen, manual workers, architects, teachers, people skilled in the hospitality trade, care professions etc). In addition to benefitting the families themselves, the skills many of the refugees bring with them are a significant asset to the communities in which they are settled.

**Outcome 3** – Older and vulnerable residents are safe and supported with choices to live independently: all the refugees are vulnerable to an extent, having experienced trauma and displacement. On top of this a significant proportion have health problems that need addressing once they arrive in the UK. The support provided through the scheme enables them to access the services they require and to live as independently as possible in the community. To date none of the refugees have had to access residential care or, if children, been taken into care.

## **6. Equality Impact Assessment**

6.1 An initial Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and is attached to this report. It is believed that the basis of the scheme (bringing vulnerable refugees straight from the countries surrounding Syria to resettle in the UK) and, further, the way the scheme operates in Kent to assess and meet individual needs (many of which are based on the protected characteristics) mean that the equality needs of individuals are met in as thorough way as possible.

6.2 The service specification being developed for the commissioning exercise takes account of these needs, experience to date managing the scheme and consultation with refugees and partners. The adverse impact is therefore assessed as nil, with the potential for a high positive impact. However, the situation will be constantly monitored and reviewed as the scheme develops.

## **7. Recommendation(s)**

7.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet Member takes the Key Decision to enable the commissioning process to proceed with a tender issued for the required 30 days in October/November 2019.

7.2 It is further recommended that decisions about the commissioning process and the implementation of the new contracts be delegated to the Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education.

## **8. Recommendation(s):**

The Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education on the proposed decision to:

- (i) Commission via a competitive tender the refugee resettlement support service in Kent; and
- (ii) To delegate decisions about the commissioning process and the implementation of the new contracts to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education.

## **9. Background Documents**

- Home Office Funding Instruction for local authorities in the support of the United Kingdom's Resettlement Schemes.
- Home Office Note for Local Authorities on the UK Resettlement Scheme.
- Initial Equality Impact Assessment.

## **10. Contact details**

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