

<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>
<b>Meeting date:</b>	<b>09 May 2016</b>
<b>Title of report:</b>	<b>Support services for Syrian refugees in Herefordshire</b>
<b>Report by:</b>	<b>Joint commissioning manager</b>

## **Classification**

Open

## **Key decision**

This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising one or more wards in the county.

NOTICE has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 9 (Publicity in Connection with Key Decisions) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

## **Wards affected**

County-wide

## **Purpose**

To approve the procurement of orientation and support services for Syrian refugees settling in Herefordshire.

## **Recommendation(s)**

**THAT:**

- a) the commissioning of an orientation and support service for Syrian refugees by way of an open competitive procurement process is approved;**
- b) authority is delegated to the director for adults and wellbeing to award a contract for the provision of the orientation and support service at the conclusion of a tender evaluation process, for a period of two years and for a total value not exceeding £540,000.**

## Alternative options

- 1 That Herefordshire not accept Syrian refugees for re-settlement in the county. This option is not recommended given the Government's apparent expectation that every local authority will re-settle at least 50 refugees. The council has indicated that it intends to receive 60 Syrian refugees in 2016.
- 2 To not commission a support service. This approach is not advised because refugees are likely to have a significant and complex range of needs and will need support to address them, to gain access to public services and to settle into their new environment. Without such support, it is unlikely that the refugees would be able to settle and integrate effectively into local communities. The council and its main partners have neither the staffing resources nor the expertise to provide this support and it would not be realistic to rely on the voluntary and community sector to provide the necessary services without funding or co-ordination.
- 3 To commission a service without a competitive procurement process. This option is not advised since the nature and scale of the proposed service and its financial value indicate clearly that it is subject to public sector procurement rules. These and the council's own contract procedure rules suggest that a competitive tender process is appropriate. Soft market testing which has been recently conducted indicates that a variety of different organisations would be interested in submitting tenders for this service. A competitive procurement service will help ensure a full range of options is available for consideration in a way that could not be achieved without such a service.
- 4 To commission an orientation and support service combined with the provision of housing for Syrian refugee families. This is not recommended as the sourcing of sufficient private sector housing in appropriate locations for refugees is likely to be beyond a single housing agency and consigning this strategic work to a procurement process, will lead to delay. There would then be significant risk of insufficient housing being available in time. A combined approach is also likely to deter some potential bidders, thereby limiting competition.

## Reasons for recommendations

- 5 The Government has established a Syrian vulnerable persons' resettlement programme (VPR) to take 20,000 people from Syria and its borders over a five year period to enable them to settle in the UK. It has been seeking commitments from local authorities throughout the country to accept and support refugees.
- 6 Herefordshire Council first indicated its willingness to work with its partners to welcome up to 60 Syrian refugees to the county in September 2015. It has recently confirmed that it will accept that number (approximately 18 families), with a view to them arriving gradually from September 2016. This pledge has now been put formally to the Minister for Syrian Refugees, who has accepted it.
- 7 The council's working group on refugees and asylum seekers, which involves various partner agencies, has identified a wide and complex range of issues which will need to be addressed in re-settling the refugees. The Home Office and the minister for Syrian Refugees have promoted general good practice in the settlement of refugees and its own "statement of requirements", which set out what councils and their partners must put in place in the way of orientation and support services.
- 8 It is proposed that the new service should be procured via a competitive commercial process, in view of its critical importance and the financial value. In addition, the best provider for the service could be drawn from a range of different types of organisation

and could establish a collaborative approach based on the capabilities required and patterns of practice nationally. These might include social housing providers, specialist refugee and asylum agencies and other voluntary organisations with local and cultural knowledge.

## Key considerations

- 9 The profile of the expected Syrian refugee population coming to Herefordshire is determined by the nature of the government's Vulnerable Persons Re-settlement programme. People are brought directly from camps and informal settlements around the Syrian borders and to be considered must meet at least one of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)'s seven vulnerability criteria. This means that people will generally be children and women at risk, survivors of torture or violence, disabled people or those with significant health needs. They will all come in family groups and children will be around half of the cohort. Approximately 20% or 12 refugees are likely to have complex needs in relation to health, social care or education. As far as possible, the Home Office will match people from rural parts of Syria to areas like Herefordshire. This may mean that a smaller proportion of refugees can speak English as this appears to be less common in rural areas.
- 10 The needs of refugee families are expected to be many and varied. These will arise from arriving in a new country with a very different regime, culture, economy and climate and from surviving torture, abuse, civil war, loss of home, malnutrition and deprivation of essential services. The council is working with voluntary, community and faith organisations in finalising the shape of the support services required. These organisations will also provide a wide range of informal support and facilities which will wrap around and complement the commissioned service. The needs which the new service will address through direct support and by connecting families to essential services include:
- Basic household equipment and needs
  - Access to benefits
  - Interpreting, translation and language classes for adults
  - Allocation of a Home Office biometric ID card.
  - Finding employment or taking up training and other opportunities
  - Enrolling children in school and orientating to the education system, including access to language support and special educational needs.
  - Registering with GP and dentist and familiarising with other basic health services, allied to initial health screening, public health advice and any vaccinations required.
  - Secondary and specialist health services, including mental health services.
  - Meeting families' faith and spiritual needs
  - Child care and other pre-school services and support
  - Cultural orientation and understanding civil society
  - Tenant and landlord issues
  - Getting about and settling into community life generally.

- 11 The contracted service will be funded through monies allocated to local authorities on a per capita basis for each refugee in order to support them for the first two years. This funding will also be used to meet other costs including interpretation and translation, transport and any net costs of providing housing to refugees. The funding is one part of a whole package of financial support from government which also includes support for NHS services and education of refugee children. Although funding is also provided to local authorities for a further three years, this would be at a level insufficient to offer any specific support services. In any case, it is expected that refugee families' specialist and particular needs will be met largely within the initial two year period.
- 12 A soft market testing exercise has been completed recently in relation to the proposed service. This revealed some interest in the planned contract among a range of organisations and that there is a variety of potential models for delivering services of this kind. This process has informed the drafting of a full service specification, which is now being finalised and draws as far as possible on national standards and regional practices.
- 13 The procurement of the proposed service has been planned, having studied the recent processes undertaken in the region by Shropshire, Birmingham and Gloucestershire councils. The timeline for procurement is as follows, subject to review in the light of governance processes.

12 May	Tender documents published
23 June	Deadline for bid submissions
04 July	Tender evaluation process complete
07 July	Intention to award notice and standstill process commences
17 July	Non key decision to award
24-28 July	Contract award and mobilisation commences
5 September	Contract mobilised

- 14 The Home Office process for Syrian refugees in principle provides sufficient time for local authorities to agree to accept specific family groups and to plan for the meeting of their particular needs. Arrangements start around eight weeks ahead of arrival when profiles of individuals are sent to the council. It then confirms whether it is able to house and cater for each family group and whilst it may refuse in some circumstances, it cannot do so routinely. Around six weeks in advance, the Home Office sends detailed information about each person, including details of any particular, health, social care or educational needs. This information will be passed to the support services provider and other agencies to enable preparation. The families will then be met at the airport by the provider. Families are expected to need very intensive support over the first few weeks, gradually tapering off and reducing to a fairly low level in the second year.
- 15 The government has published information on expectations of local authorities and support services and it is intended that the programme will be guided by a regional approach, co-ordinated by the West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership (WMSMP) and giving Herefordshire access to learning from other local authorities.
- 16 The proposed service will need to work in close co-ordination with a range of council and other public services, but also with a variety of local voluntary and faith groups. Many groups and organisations, including the Diocese of Hereford wish to provide support. This will be critical in helping people to settle into communities, adjust to life in Britain and gain

employment to support their families. Interpreting and translation will be co-ordinated by the council's Equality, Resilience & Compliance Team, utilising both professionals and volunteers.

## Community impact

- 17 The recommendations are made for two primary reasons; firstly to ensure that refugees received in the county have sufficient appropriate support services to meet their needs and secondly, to ensure that their arrival does not have significant adverse impact on existing communities. There are very few people from Syria or of middle eastern origin already living in Herefordshire and the number of Muslim people is very small. This gives rise to concerns about the isolation of refugee families and also to the response of local people to settlement in their communities. Nationally and locally, whilst many people want to support refugees, there are some concerns about the impact this may have on local services and therefore, there may be some criticism of the council for supporting them, particularly at a time when council finances are already under pressure. In this context, communicating information about refugees clearly, accurately and consistently is very important. A communications strategy has been developed in outline and will be consolidated shortly.
- 18 Decisions about location of refugee families will be informed substantially by the capacity and availability of key public services. Potentially, there will be difficulties in locating families with young children across a number of year groups within Hereford city, because school places in reception and year one are in short supply. This makes it challenging to place siblings across more than one year group in the same primary school. Herefordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (HCCG) and Taurus have now undertaken to ensure that all refugees will be registered with a GP, wherever they are located. GPs are clearly the essential gateway to identifying and meeting many needs of refugees. In housing people, the first focus will be on private sector accommodation, and suitable houses are not likely to be available in sufficient numbers in one location. As a result of all these factors, it is likely that Syrian families will be located in two or at most three areas. Consideration needs to be given to all towns in the county since no location will offer a perfect balance in the availability of suitable housing and other services. Therefore, locations are subject to some further analysis and consultation with town councils and ward councillors.
- 19 The proposed service will be central to supporting refugees in their new environment and managing relationships within communities. However, alongside the service provider, voluntary and faith organisations will have important roles and are committed to working with the council to support people. All partner organisations will also be keen to promote a positive message about refugees, the reasons for welcoming them and the contribution they can make to Herefordshire society. In supporting and driving this inclusive approach to communities, the council will draw on the principles and practice reflected in the community safety and health and wellbeing strategies.

## Equality duty

- 20 The proposed service is intended in part to address potential inequalities facing Syrian refugees arriving in Herefordshire. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires us to pay "due regard" to eliminating unlawful discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity, and fostering good relations. We can do this by:
  - Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.

- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.
  - Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.
- 21 The specification currently being prepared for the tender document will make this requirement clear.
- 22 This proposal will carry no risk of negative equality impact for local people.
- 23 The standard procurement process will ensure that equality considerations are embedded from the start, and that we are compliant with the Equality Act.

## Financial implications

- 24 The total costs of the proposed service contract will be met in full from payments made to the council from the Home Office in respect of each individual Syrian refugee. The contract costs will represent around 68% of the funding available from the government for support and general local authority costs in the first two years. In the first year, the government will also provide £4,500 for the education of each child over five years old and £2,200 towards NHS costs for each person. Additional funding is available on a case by case basis to support individuals with complex needs in relation to health, social care or education.

## Legal implications

- 25 In January 2016 the Home Secretary made a statement to Parliament outlining the UK Government's intention to relocate to the UK some of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees displaced to neighbouring countries by the ongoing conflict. The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (the Scheme) will prioritise help for survivors of torture and violence, and women and children at risk or in need of medical care.
- 26 The Home Office has asked all local authorities to take at least 50 individuals under the Scheme and the council has agreed to accept up to 60 individuals (likely to equate to a maximum of 20 households). Central government will meet the costs of the arrivals in terms of accommodation and integration support, health and education costs for the first year from arrival and the Home Office has issued a Statement of Requirements which identifies the outcomes expected.
- 27 The council intends that the orientation and support services as set out in the Statement of Requirements be delivered by a third party provider under a contract for services. The contract will run for two years and its lifetime value will be £540k.
- 28 Where the council wishes to let contracts for services of the type described in this report and the lifetime value of those contracts exceeds €750,000 (equivalent to £589,148), then under Regulation 74 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 the council is required to let these contracts in accordance with provisions of section 7 of the Public Contract Regulations - the light touch regime.
- 29 The lifetime value of the contract required is less than the threshold referred to in paragraph 25 but, this does not prohibit the council from adopting the light touch regime. The council may consider it appropriate to adopt the light touch regime in these circumstances as to do so may enable it to reach a wider market of providers and consequently deliver value for money for the Scheme, the council and the individuals.

## **Risk management**

- 30 The main risks arising from the proposals in this report are;
- There will be insufficient bids of quality from appropriately qualified providers to ensure that the service can be provided on schedule and to the appropriate standards.
  - The provider will not receive appropriate collaboration and support from statutory and voluntary services locally on which refugees will depend.
  - The arrival of refugees may present challenges to community cohesion and the service and its provider may face challenge from the public or the local media.
- 31 Care has been taken in the development of the specification and wider preparation to ensure the readiness of public sector and voluntary organisations and generally a high level of commitment and awareness is demonstrated. The soft market testing undertaken and the processes already implemented by neighbouring authorities give confidence that a credible and effective provider will be identified. The communications approach and motivation of public and voluntary sector providers will assist in promoting and informing public and media understanding. In all its preparations, Herefordshire is able to learn from the experience and knowledge of other local authorities and the WMSMP.
- 32 If the recommendations in this report are not approved then the following risks would arise;
- The council would not be able to implement and honour its commitment to receive Syrian refugees during 2016 and so would have to withdraw its pledge to the government. This would bring very considerable reputational risk to the council and challenge from the government which could have impact in other respects. There would also be very significant challenge and criticism from local voluntary organisations, faith groups and public sector partners.

## **Consultees**

- 33 The views of the following partners have been taken into consideration in forming the recommendations of this report:

West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership  
The Diocese of Hereford  
Gloucester City Council  
Shropshire Council  
Herefordshire Clinical Commissioning Group

## **Appendices**

None

## **Background papers**

None identified