

PEOPLE COMMITTEE

12 SEPTEMBER 2018

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

SYRIAN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT SCHEME

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update Members on the Council's progress to date and consider options for the future that will enable the Council to meet its previous pledges under the scheme.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **That members note the current difficulties encountered in meeting Melton's commitment to the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme and acknowledge the associated risk of not meeting the pledge.**
- 2.2 **That members give further consideration to Options 1, 2 and 3 at Sections 3.11 to 3.17 of this report.**

3.0 KEY ISSUES

Background

- 3.1 On 13 April 2016 the Head of Communities and Neighbourhoods provided a report to the former Policy Finance & Administration Committee requesting members' approval for an allocation of two families (up to 10 persons) per annum in relation to the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. There has been some concern recently regarding the ability of Leicestershire districts, including Melton, to meet their pledges under this scheme.
- 3.2 The Government announced an intention to expand the existing scheme which currently assists women and children that are at risk, have been tortured and have a medical need. The target was to resettle four hundred individuals per month from October 2015, although this could be scaled up.
- 3.3 The UNHCR identifies people in need of resettlement based on the following criteria: women and girls at risk; survivors of violence and/or torture; refugees with legal and/or physical protection needs; refugees with medical needs or disabilities; children and adolescents at risk; persons at risk due to sexual orientation or gender identity; and refugees with family links in resettlement countries.
- 3.4 The Syrian Vulnerable People are not asylum seekers and have leave to remain in the United Kingdom from day one. As refugees they will be granted a five year humanitarian protection visa. This will entitle refugees access to public funds including housing, access to the labour market and the possibility of family reunion.
- 3.5 Local authorities were asked to determine the number of refugees that can be assisted through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme in their local authority area. Local authorities needed to ensure that they have the infrastructure and support networks needed to ensure the appropriate care and integration of refugees.
- 3.6 Members approved an allocation of two families per year (up to 10 people) for Melton in respect of the Syrian Vulnerable Person Relocation Scheme. It was agreed that the accommodation for this scheme was met from the Private Rented Sector.

- 3.7 On 29 November 2016 two Syrian families were housed under this scheme in the Melton Borough. The family make ups consisted of one couple with three children and one couple with two children. The three bedroom properties used to house these families had previously been leased by Melton Borough Council from the landlord for use as temporary accommodation for families who were homeless and eligible for assistance. It was agreed that Melton Borough Council did not have the need for these properties after October 2016 due to low occupancy and the landlord was approached and agreed to assist with the SVPRS project. Both families have settled well into the Melton community.

Recent difficulties in allocating appropriate housing

- 3.8 Two recent planned intakes of families to the Melton area, proposed as part of the MBC pledge, in January and September 2018 have been cancelled due to the lack of suitable housing for families on the charter flights. January 2018 saw a three bedroom home made available through a private landlord, however there was no suitable family to be allocated to the property. The September 2018 timescales were also brought forward unexpectedly by the programme, and although we had identified a suitable property, the relevant vetting of the property and suitable families was not possible.
- 3.9 In order to maximise the probability of allocating properties to families on the charter flights, it is necessary to have a number of options available, including the number of bedrooms, and location of the property, particularly if the families contain children of a schooling age. Should this variety not be available, it is likely that further inability to meet the specific needs of families will continue, and that the council will fail to meet the pledge agreed to by members

Schedule of Future Arrivals

- 3.10 The next chartered flight is scheduled for 28 November 2018 with a deadline for accommodation of 10 October 2018. Following this, a further scheduled flight is due in March 2019. The Council will ideally accept families from both intakes in order to meet the pledge.

Options for Further Consideration

1. Continue with private landlord allocations with increased publicity and assured rent

- 3.11 This would be a continuation of the process currently followed by officers, whereby existing links within the private landlord community are built upon to assess the availability of suitable properties. To date, very few private landlords or managing agents have expressed an interest in accepting families from the resettlement scheme, however recent attempts in Blaby District have proven fruitful.
- 3.12 Publicity of the resettlement scheme has so far been restricted to those landlords who we anticipate may accept families, however, additional publicity of the scheme through mail drops, inclusion of leaflets within Council letters to landlords, and the more intensive notification of the scheme to management companies may provide additional properties in future.
- 3.13 A 2 year rental guarantee for properties used for families resettled under the scheme will provide additional reassurance to landlords. This option will not require additional spend by the Authority as rental costs will be fully covered by Housing Benefit, and families receive intensive support throughout the process to ensure the relevant benefits are allocated. Should the rental rate of the properties increase over this initial 2 year period, Discretionary Housing Payments would be considered to counter any shortfall in Housing Benefit. Appendix 1 provides costed examples of rental options.

2 The use of Registered Social Landlord stock

- 3.14 Registered Social Landlords also have limited stock in the Melton Borough. Planning approval has been given for around 80 new homes on Nottingham Road and Leicester Road in 2019/20, offering an opportunity to use a limited number of these properties for SVPRS purposes.
- 3.15 Members are asked to provide guidance to officers regarding whether Registered Social Landlords should be approached to ascertain their interest in assisting Melton Borough Council meet their pledge. This will not have a financial impact upon Council budgets, however, similarly to the use of Council housing stock, this is housing that would, under normal circumstances, have been allocated through the Choice Based Lettings scheme.

3 Use of properties through the proposed MBC housing management company

- 3.16 Officers are exploring the feasibility of establishing a housing entity which could purchase properties for rental on the private housing market, providing additional capacity within a low availability sector. The terms of such purchases and subsequent rentals would be on private market terms and these properties would not be incorporated in the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme.
- 3.17 It is proposed that, should this proposal be fully implemented, and properties purchased as a result, these homes could be made available for use by the SVPRS, in turn assisting the Council in meeting its pledge to the scheme. As these properties would not be part of CBL, the impact upon the allocation of properties to residents already on the housing register would be minimised.

Other Options Considered but Discounted

1. The use of MBC housing stock

- 3.18 The use of Melton Borough Council own stock was not proposed in the original recommendation due to the limited available of family homes for people in the Borough who have a high housing need. In 2017/18 the Council successfully allocated 53 family homes and so far in 2018/19 we have let six family homes. The housing register currently contains 648 families requiring two or three bedroom properties including 88 families who are considered to have a high or priority housing need, including 22 families in temporary accommodation. The pledge would require the use of two properties over the next 6 month period should suitable accommodation be available
- 3.19 At the time of the initial MBC pledge to the scheme, elected members determined that due to the lack of available family homes in the Borough and the high demand from families in particular, not to consider Melton Borough Council's own stock for this pledge. For this reason, the use of MBC stock will not be recommended at this time.

2 Purchase of properties using Right to Buy (RTB) receipts

- 3.20 On 5th September 2018, the Place Committee resolved to retain RTB receipts, and include in the capital programme the supply of new and affordable rented housing, through either new schemes or purchases. This will increase the number of properties available to the Council to potentially allocate to residents and families through the SVPRS. Any purchases, however, will likely occur in 2019/20 and will be unlikely to assist MBC in meeting the need to assist two families in the remainder of 2018/19.

4.0 POLICY AND CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

The report sets out MBC's pledge to the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, as agreed by members in 2017. Alongside this commitment, the report has implications regarding the following corporate priorities:

PP1 Helping people fulfil their potential and achieve their ambitions.

PP2 Work with our partners to address vulnerability and tackle the root causes of social problems, building safe, happy and healthy communities.

The report will also assist in delivering our Corporate Plan priority to increase the availability of good quality homes which meet local needs.

5.0 FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The proposals outlined within the report do not have a financial impact upon the authority. Rental costs of properties used as part of the scheme will be fully covered by Housing Benefit rates, determined before any offer to a family is made. As it is not proposed that MBC stock is included to meet the pledge, there is no additional cost regarding repair or void activity associated to the scheme.

The failure to meet the Council's pledge could lead to financial penalties, however this is yet to be determined, and further updates will be provided to members should this be proposed.

6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS/POWERS

The failure to meet the Council's pledge to the scheme may have legal implications. Further guidance will be sought should this become a possibility

7.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY

Necessary provisions are in place to support resettled families in Melton, which includes provision relating to the safety of these families once resettled.

8.0 EQUALITIES

None identified

9.0 RISKS

L I K E L I H O O D	A	Very High				
	B	High				
	C	Significant		1, 2		
	D	Low		3		
	E	Very Low				
	F	Almost Impossible				
			Negligible 1	Marginal 2	Critical 3	Catastrophic 4

IMPACT

Risk No	Risk Description
1	Reputational damage from the Council failing to meet the pledge
2	Financial or legal consequences as a result of failing to meet the pledge
3	Additional cost to the Council as a result of unforeseen rental increases in the private rental markey

10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE

10.1 There are no implications arising from this report

11.0 CONSULTATION

11.1 Management Team and Policy Forum members have been consulted.

12.0 WARDS AFFECTED

12.1 All

Contact Officer Albert Wilson, Housing, Welfare and Safer Communities Manager

Date: 31/08/2018

Appendices :

Background Papers:

Reference :