

SYRIAN VULNERABLE PERSONS RELOCATION SCHEME (SVPRS) - HOUSING PROVISION

Housing and Health Advisory Committee - 28 February 2017

Report of Chief Officer Communities & Business

Status For consideration

Also considered by Cabinet - 9 March 2017

Key Decision No

Executive Summary: This report sets out information about a vacant six bedroom social housing property and seeks approval to work with West Kent Housing Association to make the property available for a Syrian refugee family, as part of the Kent Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS).

This report supports the Key Aim of safe and caring communities and healthy environment

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Michelle Lowe

Contact Officers Lesley Bowles, Ext 7335

Hayley Brooks, Ext 7272

Recommendation to Housing and Health Advisory Committee: For consideration and to note the report.

Recommendation to Cabinet: Members are asked to approve that officers work with West Kent Housing Association to make available a vacant six bedroom adapted social housing property in Eynsford to resettle a suitable Syrian refugee family as part of the Kent SVPRS.

Reason for recommendation:

This Council has been asked to pledge support to resettle identified Syrian families as part of the Kent Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme, if suitable accommodation and support services are available.

Members are asked to consider offering a six bed WHKA social housing property in Eynsford to a Syrian refugee family, if a suitable family can be identified. Suitability will be based on whether the property location, adaptations and other required support services are available to meet their needs.

Introduction and Background

- 1 In response to the current crisis in Syria, the Government set up the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS) in February 2014. This scheme involves taking identified vulnerable refugees straight from the Middle East and resettling them in the UK. The refugees are given five years Humanitarian Leave to Remain and as such are able to work and claim benefits and other public funds from day one.
- 2 On 7 September 2015, the Prime Minister announced that SVPRS will be expanded so that 20,000 people will be assisted under the scheme by the end of the Parliament in 2020. Local authorities are key to the delivery of this offer. The scheme is currently voluntary and dependent on local authorities agreeing to take part. To date, over 10 families have been resettled by Kent district councils in partnership with Kent County Council as part of the Kent scheme.
- 3 To date this Council has not pledged to resettle any families due to the lack of suitable private rented housing. Officers continue to work with Kent partners, local church organisations, voluntary sector, housing associations and private landlords to identify housing opportunities to resettle families in this District.
- 4 As part of the Scheme, the Home Office requires local authorities to provide resettlement support for at least one year using the funding provided for each family, with housing for five years. The support involves assisting families to resettle into the UK, helping them to access all the appropriate services and fully integrating them into their community.

West Kent Housing Association (WKHA) property

- 5 An opportunity has arisen to provide a social housing property owned by West Kent Housing Association in this District. This property is a six bedroom semi-detached property in Eynsford village. The property has been specially adapted some time ago with wheelchair ramp access and extended to include a ground floor bedroom with its own bathroom and flush floor shower. WKHA have stated that the property does require some updating and modernisation to improve the living conditions.
- 6 The property has been empty since 22 February 2016 with WKHA unable to identify a local housing need for this six bed adapted property. Of the current 758 people on the Sevenoaks District Housing Register there is no one who has a six bedroom need, only one person who requires a five bedroom property and a further 17 people requiring a 4 bedroom property. The additional costs for under occupation for this size of property means that this property is unaffordable to smaller families locally.
- 7 This Council has currently not been approached by any private landlord or church organisations offering suitable family sized properties to resettle refugee families. Housing Syrian refugee families in private rented accommodation would normally be the first choice as part of the

resettlement scheme, to ensure that the local need for social housing is not ceded to accommodate refugee families. However on this occasion, no local need for this type and size of property can be identified, either within the District or across Kent.

- 8 West Kent Housing Association is working closely with this Council to consider alternative options for this home as they can not continue to sustain ongoing void costs associated with the lack of rental income on this property. It is been used on occasions as emergency temporary accommodation. As part of these options the following have already been considered:
- Conversion to create two smaller properties - WKHA have stated that this is not practical due to the layout of the rooms or financially viable to convert this property.
 - Sell the property on the open market - WKHA could sell the property on the open market. This would result in the loss of a large family sized social housing property in this District. WKHA are not obliged to reinvest the money from this sale back into this District.
 - Offer it to other districts to meet their need - this property has been offered to other neighbouring district councils, and across Kent, as part of a reciprocal arrangement. No other district has a housing need on their Housing Register for a six bed adapted property.

Opportunities for Resettlement in this Property

- 9 The recommendation set out in this report would enable this adapted family home to remain within the social housing allocation for Sevenoaks District and be used to resettle a vulnerable Syrian refugee family as part of the Kent SVPR Scheme.
- 10 The family would remain at this property for a five year period, as part of their Humanitarian consent, and be able to work and claim benefits as required immediately, providing WKHA with the necessary sustained rental income for this period. The property could then be re-assessed at this point to establish whether a local need has arisen or to reconsider alternative options based on the housing market at that time.
- 11 The availability of this empty property, with no local need, enables this Council to contribute to the efforts of the Kent SVPR Scheme, to which we have not been able to pledge our support to date due to the lack of housing availability.
- 12 This Council would work closely with partner organisations including church groups, voluntary sector, KCC and contracted providers already in place to offer ongoing support to the family so they can access local schools, health services, social care, support services and English tuition, as part of the co-ordinated Scheme. Our HERO Officers would also be able to assist the family with access to other localised support and council services including

benefits, council tax, community interventions, retraining and employment services.

- 13 This Council would work closely with KCC and the Home Office to identify the most suitable family for this adapted property and based on its rural location in Eynsford village. The KCC Co-ordinator confirms that this has occurred elsewhere in the county when the location, type of property and support requirements are only suitable for particular families, particularly when a property is within a rural location with limited transport and access links.
- 14 This Council would have access to local authority funding, provided by the Home Office, for support services, with additional funding available for education and any required health and medical care costs. Extra funding may be available in exceptional cases towards updating the property, additional adaptations and to cover immediate property void costs to enable it to remain empty until a suitable family is allocated to this home.

The challenges for Resettlement in this Property

- 15 The village of Eynsford is a rural location and although it has a train station with trains going to Sevenoaks, Swanley and London, a primary school and some local shops, it has limited access to a main town via public transport which could result in the family feeling isolated. Local community networks are strong and would be needed to help the family to adjust to life within a rural community, as well as the support worker who would be assigned to work with the family on an ongoing basis.
- 16 Eynsford village is one of the less ethnically diverse wards in the District with a population of 1,814, 2.5% of which is from a BME background. In comparison, the BME data for some of the neighbouring wards is: 2.1% Kemsing, 2.3% Otford & Shoreham and 3.9% Farningham, Horton Kirby & South Darenth, and 4.8% for the overall District (Data source: 2011 Census).
- 17 It is recognised that the ethnic diversity of the District is limited at the moment. With 'Right to Buy' bringing an increasing number of family homes onto the market, over time it is likely that we will continue to see changes in the population make up of our villages in particular.

Key Implications

Financial

- 18 Currently, the Council has made no commitment to take part in the main SVPR scheme. If this Council participates in the Kent SVPRS, it would receive the local authority tariff from the Home Office to cover the costs for supporting the resettlement of families.

Resource (non financial)

- 19 If this Council pledges to support the resettlement of a family in this District, Officer and partner resources would be required to meet the support and housing requirements, including HERO Officers to support the family. This Council's existing strong partnerships with local key agencies, the voluntary sector and local community groups would be needed to support the family and this work.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

- 20 These would need to be assessed as part of the detailed planning to take any recommended actions forward as part of this work.

Equality Assessment

- 21 Under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) the Council must have due regard to (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010, (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups, and (iii) foster good relations between people from different groups. The decisions recommended through this paper directly impact on end users. The impact has been analysed and does not vary between groups of people. The results of this analysis are set out immediately below.
- 22 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out. The decisions recommended through this paper will assist vulnerable families.

Conclusions

- 23 This Council has not been in a position to consider housing a refugee family as part of the Kent Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme due to the lack of available and suitable housing. West Kent Housing Association has been unable to let a six bedroom adapted property in Eynsford for the past year and is considering selling the property. As no local need can be found for this property, this enables the Council working with West Kent Housing Association the opportunity to house a family under the Kent Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme.

Background Papers [Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement \(VPR\) Programme - Guidance for local authorities and partners \(28 October 2015\)](#)

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/472020/Syrian_Resettlement_Fact_Sheet_gov_uk.pdf

Lesley Bowles
Chief Officer Communities & Business