

VULNERABLE PERSONS RELOCATION SCHEME (VPRS) - COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMME RESETTLEMENT PLAN ASSESSMENT

Housing and Health Advisory Committee - 20 June 2017

Report of Chief Officer Communities & Business

Status For consideration

Decision by Cabinet - 13 July 2017

Key Decision Yes

Executive Summary: This Council may be asked by local charities, who apply to resettle families as part of the Home Office Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS) Community Sponsorship Programme, to agree their application to operate as a community sponsor in this District. Sponsoring organisations need the agreement of their local authority in order to be able to apply to the Home Office for the scheme.

At its meeting on 15 October 2016, Cabinet resolved that Officers work on and implement a process to consider applications from potential Community Sponsors under the Government's Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS) Community Sponsorship Programme.

Members asked Officers to bring back the assessment matrix once it was developed. This report sets out the proposed Assessment Form.

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

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Michelle Lowe

Contact Officers Hayley Brooks, Ext. 7272

Recommendation to Housing and Health Advisory Committee:

For consideration and to note the content of this report.

Recommendation to Cabinet:

- a) to approve the assessment form for this Council's response to Community Sponsorship Programme Resettlement Plan applications as set out at Appendix A;
 - b) to delegate authority to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, following consultation with local Members, to make decisions relating to the VPRS
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Reason for recommendation:

This Council may be asked by local charities, who apply to resettle families as part of the Home Office VPRS Community Sponsorship Programme, to give consent to approve their application to operate as a community sponsor in this District.

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 In July 2016, a Community Sponsorship Programme was launched by the Home Secretary. This scheme enables local registered charities or Community Interest Companies to act as a Sponsor to apply directly to support the resettlement of refugees as part of the Government's Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS).

Sevenoaks District Community Sponsorship Programme Resettlement Plan Assessment

- 3 The Sponsor must have written evidence from local authorities in which they wish to place a resettled family, which supports the approval of their Resettlement Plan application. In two-tier areas, consent must be sought from both the County and District Councils. The application is then considered by the Home Office and other Government agencies.
- 4 On 15 October 2016, Members asked Officers to develop a process to consider applications from potential Community Sponsors so that this Council can assess whether it should consent the approval of the applicant to operate as a Community Sponsor in this District.
- 5 The Sponsor must be able to demonstrate that they have suitable and sustainable accommodation for a resettled family, and that it will be available for a resettled family to use for a minimum of two years.
- 6 The Home Office guidelines state that a local authority might object to a Resettlement Plan application based on:
 - a) insufficient capacity to accommodate a family in the proposed housing area (e.g. lack of school places);
 - b) concerns about community tensions in the proposed housing area;
 - c) where they have reason to believe that the community organisation is not suitable to undertake the resettlement of vulnerable adults and children; or

d) another appropriate reason.

- 7 The proposed Community Sponsorship Programme Resettlement Plan assessment form is attached at Appendix A. This will enable Officers to assess any proposed Plans submitted by potential local Sponsors against a set scoring criteria.
- 8 Members are asked to approve this assessment form and delegate authority to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, in consultation with local Members, to make decisions relating to this work.

Key Implications

Financial

- 9 The Community Sponsor will need to demonstrate sufficient resources (financial, housing and personnel) and a detailed plan, backed by relevant experience of supporting communities. They will be responsible for meeting and welcoming the family, providing housing for the first two years, supporting access to services and support towards employment, language tuition and self-sufficiency.
- 10 If an approved Community Sponsor fails in their responsibilities, additional costs may be required to put in place alternative support. However, additional funding may be available on a case by case basis.
- 11 In the event that a family becomes homeless the local authority would be expected to house the family in accordance with their normal procedures.

Resource (non financial)

- 12 Officer time will be required to undertake the assessment process.
- 13 If this Council supports the Sponsors' Resettlement Plan, some existing Officer and partner resources may be required as part of the standard service delivery requirements which support local residents and communities.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

- 14 Beneficiaries have the same entitlements as any UK citizen. Successful community sponsors will be required to sign an agreement with the Home Office, setting out the responsibilities of the sponsor and the Home Office.

Risk	Mitigation
Suitability of the sponsor	Both the District and County Council are required to assess the sponsor before they consent to an application being made to the Home Office.

Failure of the sponsor to perform	The Home office may terminate the contract with the Sponsor
Security and Safeguarding	Beneficiaries will be assessed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees as being exceptionally vulnerable. The final decision on acceptance of cases is taken by the Home Office. The Sponsor is required to demonstrate to the Home Office that they have a robust safeguarding policy and procedures in place.
Family becoming homeless after the first two years	A meeting would be held between the sponsor and the housing authority towards the end of the two year period to allow for any housing issues to be discussed and solutions agreed in advance of the two year period.

Equality Assessment

- 15 Members are reminded 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.
- 16 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out. The decisions recommended through this paper will assist vulnerable families.

Conclusions

- 17 It is necessary to have in place a system of assessment in case the council is approached by a potential community sponsor. Members are asked to approve this assessment form to enable this Council to consider whether it should consent the approval of the applicant to operate as a Community Sponsor for a refugee family in this District. The Sevenoaks District Community Sponsorship Resettlement Plan assessment is attached at Appendix A.
- 18 Members are asked to delegate powers for this process to the Portfolio Holder responsible for Housing, following consultation with local Members.

Appendices Appendix A - Community Sponsorship Resettlement Plan Assessment

Background Government's Full Community Sponsorship:

Papers

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-for-full-community-sponsorship>

Lesley Bowles

Chief Officer Communities & Business