

SEVENOAKS DISTRICT COUNCIL UK RESETTLEMENT SCHEME PROTOCOL

Cabinet - 16 April 2020

Report of Chief Officer People and Places

Status For Consideration

Key Decision Yes

Executive Summary: This report sets out this Council's Policy for participating in the UK Resettlement Scheme, which updates the current Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS) in Kent. It is broadly very similar to the existing scheme.

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

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Robert Piper

Contact Officers Hayley Brooks, Ext. 7272 & Lisa Webb, Ext. 7231

Recommendation to Housing and Health Advisory Committee:

For consideration and to note the content of the report.

Recommendation to Cabinet:

- a) to adopt the updated Sevenoaks District Council UK Resettlement Scheme Policy set out in Appendix A;
- b) to delegate authority to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health to make decisions relating to the Sevenoaks District Council UK Resettlement Scheme Policy.

Reason for recommendation: The national Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS) comes to an end in May 2020 and is being replaced by the 'UK Resettlement Scheme'. This report sets out a Policy to enable affordable and suitable private rented properties to be used for the UK Resettlement Scheme, on a case-by-case basis.

Introduction and Background

- 1 As part of its response to the refugee crisis in Syria, the Government set up the SVPRS in February 2014. This scheme involves taking particularly 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 access other public funds from day one.

- 2 In September 2015, the Government announced that the SVPRS would be expanded so that 20,000 people would be assisted under the scheme by 2020. The scheme is voluntary and dependent on local authorities agreeing to take part. Both the district and county council (in two-tier areas) are responsible for arranging housing, school places and any additional support that is required. Housing is normally provided in the private rented sector, as determined by the Local Housing Authority.

Resettlement Scheme - Sevenoaks District

- 3 In October 2015, it was agreed that Kent County Council (KCC) would co-ordinate and commission a service and work in partnership with Kent district councils. The providers work closely with the district council, KCC, other agencies and the voluntary sector to provide all the necessary support to the families.
- 4 In July 2017, Cabinet approved the decision for this Council to participate in the SVPRS programme in Kent, in partnership with KCC. Delegated authority was agreed for the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health to make decisions relating to the scheme, in consultation with the relevant local Members.
- 5 In Sevenoaks District Council's area, housing refugee families in rented accommodation relies on local private landlords willing to offer a property for the SVPRS and the property must be at an affordable rental rate (at the Local Housing Allowance rate). This Council has chosen not to use social housing, as not to reduce social housing for local people on the Housing Register.
- 6 As at January 2020, five Syrian families have been resettled into properties in the District. All of the families have re-settled well, with most of the adults/adult children now in employment or further education/training. The families continue to be supported by the KCC commissioned provider and Sevenoaks Welcomes Refugees, a local voluntary sector organisation.

The UK Resettlement Scheme

- 7 In June 2019, the Government confirmed its ongoing commitment to resettlement families and announced plans for a more globally focused scheme. All current resettlement schemes, including the SVPRS, will be consolidated into one new scheme. This new scheme will be known as the 'UK Resettlement Scheme' and will not have a specific geographical focus, with the nationalities of refugees potentially changing in response to world events. Priority areas will be set by the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). The scheme will be open to refugees identified by the UNHCR to be in need of resettlement to the UK because of their vulnerability (as with the SVPRS).

- 8 The Home Office conducts security checks on refugee families before choosing to accept families for UK resettlement. This includes checks on criminal records, military background, political affiliation and family background. The International Organisation for Migration also carries out a detailed interview of the family when they apply to be resettled including their past history and reason for fleeing their country of origin. The Home Office also undertakes interviews by skype with the families prior to their arrival in the UK. Families have to meet specific United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) criteria determined by the Home Office in order to be resettled in the UK to ensure that the most vulnerable are given priority. These include amongst others survivors of conflict, those with legal and/or physical protection needs and children and adolescents at risk.
- 9 The new scheme will operate in the same way as before and will begin as soon as the original target of 20,000 refugees has been met - this is expected to be around April 2020. Government anticipate a smooth transition and expects there to be a seamless continuation between the current and new schemes. It is anticipated that the nationalities of refugees will be broadly similar to the existing schemes including families from Syria. This update, enables the scheme to consider the nationalities of refugees resettled in response to world events and the global context. In the first year of the new scheme (2020-21), the UK will aim to resettle approximately 5,000 refugees.
- 10 The new scheme remains voluntary for local authorities and officials will work with each Council to identify a suitable family based on the type of property available, location and proximity to relevant support services. This Council will look at accepting families as and when suitable properties are available, on a case by case basis.
- 11 Based on the five Syrian families already resettled in the District, the Council will continue to prioritise its support for Syrian families to help further embed community cohesion and support from local services.
- 12 The recommendation set out in this report asks Members to adopt the updated Sevenoaks District Council UK Resettlement Scheme Policy, as set out at Appendix A. This enables the Council to participate in the new scheme when suitable and affordable properties are identified (in the same way as the SVPRS).
- 13 The Policy details how this Council to work closely with local partners including KCC and the contracted support provider. Properties put forward for the scheme will be considered on a case-by-case basis and approved under the Policy, once the property has been assessed for its affordability and suitability for the scheme, in consultation with KCC and the local health/support providers.

Key Implications

Financial

As with the SVPRS, under the UK Resettlement Scheme, KCC will receive the local authority tariff from the Home Office to cover the support and associated costs relating to each family. The new scheme will be of no cost to this Council.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

This Council will have a Memorandum of Understanding with Kent County Council outlining the responsibilities of both parties as part of the scheme.

Resource (non-financial)

If this Council supports the resettlement of further families in this District, existing Officer and partner resources would be required to support the family's arrival and housing requirements. This Council's existing strong partnerships with local key agencies, the voluntary sector and local community groups would support the families and this work.

Equality Assessment

Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to 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.

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out. The decisions recommended through this paper will assist vulnerable families.

Conclusions

Members are asked to adopt the updated Sevenoaks District Council UK Resettlement Scheme Policy to enable this Council to support the resettlement of refugee families, if suitable and affordable housing is identified. This Policy includes delegating powers for this work to the Portfolio Holder responsible for Housing and Health, in consultation with local Members.

Appendices

Appendix A - Sevenoaks District Council UK Resettlement Scheme Policy.

Appendix B - Sevenoaks District Council UK Resettlement Scheme Equality Impact Assessment.

Background Papers

[UK Resettlement Scheme - Note for Local Authorities](#)

Sarah Robson

Chief Officer People & Places