

Cabinet – 17 March 2021

Voluntary Refugee Community Sponsorship Scheme for Walsall

Portfolio: Councillor Andrew – Deputy Leader, Regeneration

Related portfolios: Councillor Perry – Deputy Leader, Resilient Communities

Service: Money Home Job (MHJ)

Wards: All

Key decision: Yes

Forward plan: Yes

1. Aim

To seek approval and support for the Home Office led Voluntary Refugee Community Sponsorship Scheme for Walsall.

2. Summary

- 2.1 The UK Community Sponsorship scheme was launched in July 2016 by the Home Office. The scheme allows specific community groups to sponsor and support refugee families directly in a bid to deliver resilient and integrated members of the community. The community sponsors secure their own residential unit, raise an initial £9,000 investment, and provide a holistic package of support to the individuals when they arrive. The Government provide one off tariff payments to the local authority to cover estimated additional education and health costs in the first year. The Community sponsors are also responsible for ensuring English language tuition, and helping the individuals access all relevant services.
- 2.2 The Council's role includes writing a letter of consent to the Home Office in support of the application, and viewing the proposed property to ensure it is suitable and safe. The council is not being asked to approve the application for the Community Sponsor Group or to conduct security checks on the Group members as the Home Office do this through a rigorous application process.
- 2.3 The scheme is an additional pathway for the refugee community through the Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) and allows community sponsor groups to welcome new communities. The VPRS scheme is a voluntary Home Office led scheme, which looks at settling refugees from

different countries into the UK. Walsall Council already has a history of helping refugees. In 2016 this Cabinet approved the resettlement of 20 Syrian refugees within Walsall through VPRS. Walsall has also housed 1 individual as at September 2020 through the Voluntary Child Resettlement Scheme (VCRS). Walsall is also a voluntary asylum dispersal area with 461 individuals being helped as at September 2020 through the Home Office and their commissioned accommodation provider, Serco and support provider, Migrant Help.

2.4 This is a key decision as it affects all wards in the borough.

3. Recommendations

3.1 That Cabinet approve and agree to be part of the government's Voluntary Refugee Community Sponsorship Scheme and endorse the process for Walsall as detailed in Appendix A.

3.2 That Cabinet delegates authority to the Director of Customer Access Management in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration to subsequently authorise the approval of any Community Sponsor Group applications and to support the selection of Community Sponsored refugee applicants through the Home Office process.

3.3 That Cabinet delegates authority to the Director of Customer Access Management, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration to authorise any variations to the draft process (Appendix A).

4. Report detail - know

Context

4.1 Community Sponsorship was launched as an additional voluntary mechanism allowing for Home Office and local authority approved community groups to facilitate the sponsorship of a refugee household taking on direct responsibility for a 12 month period, for all housing and support needs. The refugees arrive through the VPRS. The national VPRS was launched in January 2014 and has helped those in the greatest need, including people requiring urgent medical treatment, survivors of violence and torture, and women and children at risk. In September 2015, the UK government pledged to resettle 20,000 Syrians in need of protection through the VPRS. The council helped resettle 20 Syrian refugees through VPRS, and these individuals have successfully integrated into communities, accessed further education and some have entered the job market.

4.2 Of those resettled under the VPRS and VCRS in the year ending September 2020, 104 refugees were resettled in the UK through the Community Sponsorship scheme and since the scheme began in July 2016, a total of 449 refugees have been resettled by community sponsor groups. The community

sponsorship scheme enables community groups including charities, faith groups, churches and businesses to take on the role of supporting resettled refugees in the UK and directly involved in supporting the resettlement of refugees fleeing conflict and in need of protection in the UK. It encourages innovation and community led resettlement that has the potential to promote positive resettlement outcomes, both for the resettled families and local communities. All resettled families are granted Refugee status, meaning they will have the right to work and to claim relevant welfare benefits on arrival to the UK.

- 4.3 Reset is the UK's Community Sponsorship training, support and advice provider, funded by the Home Office. As well as working with Community Sponsorship volunteers, Reset also provide services to Local Authorities and Lead Sponsors who work alongside volunteers to facilitate Community Sponsorship. Reset will work with the community sponsor group and with the local authority throughout the application process and is also responsible for providing mandatory training for the community sponsor group to ensure a consistent level of knowledge and skills across all community sponsor groups.
- 4.4 Community sponsors must be local registered charities or community interest companies and are responsible for all elements of resettling the family. This includes providing accommodation, meeting the family at the airport, providing a welcoming and culturally orientated service in the community, providing English language tuition, supporting access to medical and social services and empowering communities towards gaining employment. Community sponsors are required to also provide at least £9000 in funding to meet some of the financial needs of the resettled family and have a detailed, credible and realistic plan to illustrate how they will deliver effective resettlement support to a resettled family.
- 4.5 Community sponsors need to be approved as a sponsor through an application process, which is assessed by the Home Office who has the responsibility of ensuring checks and relevant processes are in place. Community sponsors also require written consent of the local authority in the area where the resettled family will live. The Home Office guidance states the grounds on which a local authority might object to the community sponsor application which include having insufficient capacity to provide certain crucial local services in the proposed housing area (e.g. lack of school places) and concerns about community tensions in the proposed housing area. The local authority can also object to an application where they have reason to believe that the organisation is not suitable to undertake the resettlement of vulnerable adults and children, or another appropriate reason.
- 4.6 If a community sponsor meets all of the criteria, they will be approved by the Home Office and will be allocated a family. This family will generally not have complex needs to make the process accessible for the community group. The Home Office will review the community sponsor approval after six months and if they have not been allocated a resettled family within this time they may be asked to submit a new application. The draft approval process is summarised in Appendix A of this report.

4.7 The council plays a key role for those settling through this scheme and also supports and plays an important enablement role in partnership with the Community Sponsor Group. The key roles of the council include:

- Assisting the community group in ensuring their safeguarding measures are fit for purpose, and include any relevant local level changes. The community sponsor will be asked to submit their safeguarding policy to the council's Safeguarding Team to comment on. Should the Safeguarding Team be unable to do this, it will be checked by the Home Office;
- Play a role as a first point of call for the services on offer for newly arrived families;
- Approve the family arriving into the area;
- Submit claims to the Home Office for funds covering education for children and young people and for English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) for adults;
- Write a letter of consent to the Home Office for the Community Sponsorship Group to submit alongside their application;
- View the property for the family they will be supporting and conduct an inspection to ensure the property is suitable and safe.

4.7 The council is not being asked to approve the application for the Community Sponsor Group or to conduct security checks on the Group members as the Home Office do this through a rigorous application process.

Council Corporate Plan priorities

4.8 The Community Sponsorship scheme will contribute to the council's priorities as follows:

- Economic growth for all people, communities and businesses – the Community Sponsor will be required to work with incoming service users in particular working to increase employment prospects and to provide access to education opportunities.
- People have increased independence, improved health and can positively contribute to their communities – the Community Sponsor will be required to ensure a suitable move on plan is in place preventing homelessness, support in maintaining a tenancy, promoting independence and can improve mental and physical health and wellbeing.
- Communities are prospering and resilient with all housing needs met in safe and healthy places that build a strong sense of belonging and cohesion – the community sponsor is responsible for ensuring the refugees are integrated into communities and therefore will enhance community cohesion.

Risk management

- 4.9 A number of risks are present such as a breakdown in agreement between the household and support provider. In this case, the council would be required to intervene and take on responsibility for ensuring support is in place for the household. The council has the option to draw down Home Office tariffs to meet the costs. In order to mitigate this risk regular liaison by MHJ, with the Home office, Community Sponsor and the incoming service users will take place.
- 4.10 At the end of the initial 12-month period, if the Community Sponsor is unable to help facilitate a move on option for housing this could result in vulnerable households not having suitable accommodation and a potential homeless case. In order to reduce this risk the council is requiring the community sponsor to detail a move on plan for the service user(s) after an initial 6 months.

Financial implications

- 4.11 The council will claim a number of tariffs, which will be used to help support the resettlement of the household in line with the Home Office Funding Instructions 2020/2021. The tariffs can only be claimed on the service users entry to the UK and are one-off, year 1 tariffs. The council is responsible for drawing down the tariffs and distributing to the relevant service. The tariffs are set amounts and are for:
- Education – for qualifying children (£4500 per child 5-18 year olds and £2,250 per child for children aged 3-4 funding (under 3 no payment)
 - Adult Education – for each qualifying adult £850 is drawn down for ESOL
 - Walsall's Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) - to support healthcare provision the tariff is set at £2600 per person for the General Practitioner (GP) in the area and will be transferred to the GP by the council.

The council can claim Exceptional Cost payments in order to cover social care or special educational needs provision for refugees. There is no minimum or maximum amount that can be claimed but Exceptional Costs cannot be claimed for support provided to a Refugee that would normally be funded through health or education funding or through welfare payments. The council will need to ensure any incurred Exceptional Costs should be sought with written agreement from the Home Office or risk having the claim rejected.

Costs of administering the Community Sponsorship scheme are expected to be minimal and will be covered from existing budgets within Money Home Job. However, if the placement should fail the council will have the option to draw down tariffs from the Home Office to accommodate the households and provide support as detailed in Appendix A

Legal implications

- 4.12 There are no direct legal implications for the council arising out of the report. However, the council will be required to ensure any funding tariffs are utilised appropriately and in line with Home Office funding requirements.

Procurement Implications/Social Value

- 4.13 There are no procurement implications for the council as the core process is managed by the Home Office.

Property implications

- 4.14 There are no direct property implications for the council arising out of this report. However, if a placement should fail the council may be required to support housing need either through the use of temporary accommodation or potentially through a homeless application.

Health and wellbeing implications

- 4.15 Migrant groups in general are more likely to be affected by health inequalities. National research demonstrates refugees are at an increased risk of mental health problems and low subjective well-being. Living circumstances in the host country are thought to play a vital role in shaping these health outcomes, which, in turn, are prerequisites for successful integration. The Community Sponsor will be required to ensure through effective support planning the health and wellbeing outcomes are addressed and refugee service users are signposted effectively.

Staffing implications

- 4.16 There are no direct staffing implications for the council. There will be a requirement for internal service consultation on applications and the co-ordination of the process will be met within existing MHJ resources.

Reducing Inequalities

- 4.17 The implications for reducing inequalities have been taken into account and assessed as set out in a detailed Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) conducted in January 2021. The EQIA shows positive impacts for Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities in particular for those families with children and disabled groups who are more likely to be selected through the scheme.

Consultation

4.18 Consultation has been carried out internally with Adult Social Care, Childrens Services Public Health and Communities Directorates on the proposal, and they are supportive of the Voluntary Refugee Community Sponsorship Scheme. In addition, in January 2021 a prospective community sponsor group applicant was consulted on the draft process and have supported the councils approach. The feedback from the community group has been incorporated into Appendix A to reflect the needs of our customers.

5. Decide

The scheme is not a mandatory scheme and the number of refugee applicants from the scheme do not form part of any subsequent pledges made by the council through the wider VPRS scheme. The council has the option of not rolling out a Community Sponsorship scheme for Walsall.

6. Respond

If approved, then the necessary process will be implemented. The council has one applicant (as at January 2021) in Walsall who has expressed an interest to become a Community Sponsor.

7. Review

Usage and outcomes of the service will be monitored by MHJ, including details on applicants to Community Sponsorship and those who have been selected by the scheme will be reviewed quarterly.

Background papers

Appendix A - Walsall Council Community Sponsorship Approval Process

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Signed
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Childrens Services
March 2021

Signed
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Portfolio Holder Regeneration
March 2021

