

Report to: Cabinet
Date of Meeting: 4 March 2020
Public Document: Yes
Exemption: None
Review date for release None



Subject: UK Refugee Resettlement Scheme

Purpose of report:

The government has invited all local authorities to renew their commitment to refugee resettlement through a new UK Resettlement Scheme, from 2020/21.

Refugee resettlement in Devon has since 2016 been delivered through a partnership coordinated by Devon County Council. As of December 2019, 42 families (185 people) have been resettled in Devon. The resettlement infrastructure in Devon will be able to support further resettlement arrivals provided that a minimum of five families are resettled across Devon in 2020/21.

Devon County Council is asking each City and District Council to consider making a commitment to the new UK Resettlement Scheme by:

- pledging to secure a specific or minimum number of properties to accommodate new arrivals of refugee families under the local authority-managed resettlement scheme in their area in 2020/21 and;
- making a commitment in principle to participating in the UK Resettlement Scheme beyond 2020/21 subject to government confirmation of the numbers of people and associated funding – for instance by setting a maximum number of family arrivals in any year and;
- cooperating with Devon County Council in considering applications from new Community Sponsorship groups in their area on a case-by-case basis.

Recommendation:

That East Devon District Council continues to support the Devon resettlement scheme from 2020/2021.

Reason for recommendation:

Information to be used as needed within the Council to assist elected members and senior managers in making decisions about continuing the Council's involvement in the UK government's refugee resettlement scheme from 2020/21.

Officer:

Andrew Mitchell, Housing Needs and Strategy Manager
amitchell@eastdevon.gov.uk

Portfolio Holder:

Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes and Communities

Financial implications:	The direct costs incurred by the Council are recovered through government funding through Devon County Council.
Legal implications:	The report does not identify any legal implications requiring comment.
Equalities impact:	Medium Impact This initiative will provide homes for disadvantaged groups from abroad and contribute towards the humanitarian effort to assist refugees.
Climate change:	Low Impact
Risk:	Low Risk
Links to background information:	Homelessness Strategy
Link to Council Plan:	Outstanding Place and Environment Outstanding Homes and Communities

1. Background

- 1.1 Prompted by the Syrian refugee crisis, the UK government committed in 2015 to resettle 23,000 refugees in the UK by 2020. The government looked to local authorities to provide housing and integration support for families accepted for resettlement. Where local authorities volunteer to participate in resettlement, the government provides a 5-year funding package for every family resettled.
- 1.2 In response, Devon formed a partnership of City, District and County Councils, the NHS, Devon and Cornwall Police and partners in the voluntary and community sector. Devon County Council coordinates this partnership and manages the government funding. A Memorandum of Agreement is in place between all participating Councils and the operation of the scheme is overseen by an officer group from those councils.
- 1.3 Devon's Councils made independent, public decisions on the number of properties they aimed to offer for resettlement over the course of the scheme, as shown below:

Area	City/District Council pledge (families)	City/District Council offers (houses found)	Community sponsors approved (families)	Families arrived	People arrived
East Devon	8	4	1	4	18
Exeter	12	12	1	13	55
Mid Devon	5	3		2	9
North Devon	4		3	3	15
South Hams	6	6		6	23
Teignbridge	7	6	1	7	31
Torridge	Not specified		2	2	12
West Devon	4	5		5	22
Total	46+	36	8	42	185

**North Devon Council and Torridge District Council are participating in resettlement through Community Sponsorship only.*

- 1.4 The total number of family arrivals across Devon is likely to meet or exceed the total pledged, due to a small number of ongoing property offers and Community Sponsorship applications.
- 1.5 The government expects to achieve the target of resettling 23,000 refugees across the UK in the first half of 2020 and has already announced a new global resettlement scheme to start in 2020/21. The new scheme will aim to resettle a further 5,000 people in 2020/21. The number to be resettled in subsequent years will be determined through future spending rounds.
- 1.6 The government intends the new scheme to continue seamlessly from the current schemes (see letter in **annex 1**). In principle, the new UK Resettlement Scheme may accept refugees from anywhere in the world where there is acute need. In practice, it is likely that the nationalities and needs of families accepted will remain similar to current schemes at least at first - that is, of Middle Eastern and North African nationalities, displaced by the Syrian conflict or other regional crises.
- 1.7 Devon's City and District Councils enable resettlement by finding sustainable, affordable housing for refugee families. The government does not prescribe how Councils should do this. Under the current schemes, Devon's Councils have looked to the private rented sector to ensure that refugee families are not given priority over local residents' housing needs. Most of Devon's Councils have chosen to lease properties from landlords, place refugee families in the properties as Council tenants and to manage the properties and tenancies on the landlords' behalf. It is equally possible to appoint a third party as agent for the landlord, or for a landlord to accept families as direct tenants. Whatever the arrangement, sustainability and affordability are key.
- 1.8 Experience shows that resettled families will be dependent on benefit income for some time while they learn sufficient English to look for work. Councils must therefore source accommodation that is affordable within the Local Housing Allowance. There is an acute shortage of such accommodation across the county. A significant proportion of the properties that have been brought into the resettlement scheme have been provided by landlords who are moved by the plight of refugees and who want to help this group.
- 1.9 Since 2017, the government has promoted **Community Sponsorship** of refugee resettlement alongside the local authority-managed scheme. Community Sponsorship allows suitable, charitable, community and voluntary organisations to take full responsibility for the resettlement of a refugee family with the consent of the relevant local authorities and under formal contract with the government. The scheme has been a great success across the UK and in Devon, where there are now six active Community Sponsorship groups, with two groups each welcoming a second family.
- 1.10 Under the new UK Resettlement Scheme, people resettled through Community Sponsorship will be additional to the 5,000 based on local authority commitments. Councils will be unable to count Community Sponsorship towards any Council pledge.

2. Commitments from 2020

- 2.1 The specification of support services and the local authority funding package for the new scheme will not change: the government will provide a total of £20,520 for each refugee tapered over five years. The funding is intended to cover local authorities' direct costs in delivering the resettlement scheme. Devon's experience shows this to be broadly

realistic. Devon County Council reimburses City and District Councils for their declared direct costs related to the scheme. Separate additional funding also goes to local education and health services for the first year after arrival of each family.

- 2.2 Based on the current operating infrastructure in Devon, pledges of a minimum of 5 family arrivals in total across Devon during 2020/2021 will be needed from those City/District Councils that are already participating in the local authority-managed resettlement scheme, in order to provide sufficient capacity to accept any new arrival. Adjustments to the infrastructure may be needed before it is possible to accept refugees with a wider range of cultural and language needs than has so far been the case.
- 2.3 Devon County Council, as accountable body for the resettlement funding and commissioner of the principal resettlement support services, invites City/District Council partners to make a continuing commitment to the scheme if they wish to see it continue in their area and to confirm this commitment by 31.03.2020.
- 2.4 From 2015, the resources used in order to implement the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme have been drawn from the Housing Options team, who have the statutory responsibility covering the Council's homelessness service. However, the landscape has changed considerably since that time, with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018 which has placed much greater pressure on a limited supply of accommodation suitable to meet the needs of our clients.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That East Devon District Council continues to support the Devon Resettlement Scheme from 2020/2021.