

Executive Report

Ward(s) affected: All

Report of Director of Service Delivery

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Community Sponsorship Programmes

Executive Summary

The Home Office has introduced a Community Sponsorship Scheme whereby local community groups can take responsibility to welcome and support refugees from Syria and the surrounding region directly into their communities.

This initiative complements the resettlement work undertaken by local authorities as part of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). The VPRS is designed to support refugee families resettlement in the UK within a 5-year support window.

Guildford Borough Council (GBC) alongside Surrey County Council (SCC) and other Surrey Districts and Boroughs have been active participants in the Scheme since 2015.

At Guildford, the responsibility for the VPRS sits within the family support team in Community Services.

A local community group in Guildford – Resettle@Guildford - has prepared an application to the Home Office for Community Sponsorship of one household and seeks the Council's support in line with Home Office requirements to provide accommodation and support to resettle a vulnerable family.

Consent is needed from both SCC and GBC for any community sponsorship scheme's application. SCC have given their consent to the community sponsors Resettle@Guildford's application under delegated authority to the Executive Director of Children, Families and Lifelong Learning.

The application of Resettle@Guildford provides the opportunity to look at the governance of community sponsorship programmes more widely and hence the Executive is asked to delegate authority to the Director of Service Delivery in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Community and Housing to give consent to Resettle@Guildford and future community sponsorship applications subject to them meeting the Home Office criteria, which are set out further in the report.

In order for community sponsorship applications to proceed, the Executive is also asked to authorise the Head of Community Services to progress arrangements for consented community sponsorship with the Home Office.

Recommendation to Executive:

- (1) To delegate authority to the Director of Service Delivery in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing and Community to give consent to future community sponsorship applications as part of the vulnerable persons resettlement scheme, subject to them meeting Home Office criteria.
- (2) To authorise the Head of Community Services progress arrangements for consented community sponsorship with the Home Office and with Resettle@Guildford.

Reasons for Recommendation:

The resettlement of refugee households in Guildford adds to the diversity of the area and the household will have the opportunity in the long term to contribute to the local economy through employment and voluntary work. This results in a vibrant local economy with thriving towns and villages. The VPRS and Community Sponsorship Scheme present opportunities to promote community spirit, to encourage individuals and families to welcome and support refugee households and to be more resilient in times of need.

In granting delegated authority to the Director of Service Delivery in consultation with the Lead Councillor to give consent to community sponsors (such as Resettle@Guildford) alongside authorisation to the Head of Community Services to progress applications with the Home Office, this process can work efficiently and swiftly for the benefit of our communities.

Is the report (or part of it) exempt from publication?

No

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report seeks delegated authority for the Director of Service Delivery, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Community and Housing, to give consent to the Resettle@Guildford application for community sponsorship alongside any future community sponsors as part of the vulnerable persons resettlement scheme. subject to them meeting Home Office criteria.

2. Strategic Priorities

- 2.1 Community sponsorship programmes support our commitment to helping the most vulnerable in our communities and underpins our work with the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. The scheme is specifically for the most vulnerable refugees from Syria and the surrounding area, including refugee women who are at risk and survivors of violence, children, older and disabled people and those with medical needs.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Home Secretary launched the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) in January 2014 and invited all local authorities in the UK to participate. A

limited number of authorities joined, and the first refugees arrived in the UK in March 2014.

- 3.2 In response to the conflict in Syria, the Prime Minister announced on 7 September 2015 a significant extension of the VPRS to resettle up to 20,000 individual refugees over five years and requested local authorities to assist.
- 3.3 Surrey was one of the first areas in the country to give its support. Working together, the County Council, Districts and Boroughs, Health, Faith, and Voluntary Sectors have resettled over 200 refugee children and adults in Surrey under the VPRS. In Guildford, the Family Support Programme, has been commissioned to provide specialist services to meet the specific identified needs of refugee families through the scheme. These families are progressing well with improving English, children attending school, health needs being met and moving into voluntary and paid work.
- 3.4 Following the success of this scheme, the Home Office introduced a Community Sponsorship Scheme whereby local community groups can take responsibility to welcome and support refugees from Syria and the surrounding region directly into their communities. This complements resettlement work undertaken by local authorities as part of the VPRS.
- 3.5 Resettle@Guildford is a local community group that has prepared an application to the Home Office for Community Sponsorship and seeks both SCC and GBC support in line with Home Office requirements. Any prospective sponsor must obtain written evidence from the local authority that they consent to the approval of the application, and for any community sponsor in Surrey, both the County Council and relevant Borough/District Council must provide consent. However, local authorities are not responsible for assessing applications and managing the community sponsorship process as this lies with the Home Office.
- 3.6 This application has enabled us to look at the wider governance of community sponsorship schemes that may arise in Guildford. Seeking delegated authority from the Executive will enable us to help progress any future community sponsors as part of the vulnerable persons resettlement scheme subject to them meeting Home Office criteria.

4. Community Sponsorship Scheme – Criteria and Responsibilities

- 4.1 The Home Office is encouraging Community Sponsorship in response to the desire from local communities to play a greater role in refugee resettlement. Community Sponsorship enables these local community groups to take responsibility to welcome and support refugees directly into their communities and complements resettlement work already undertaken by local authorities.
- 4.2 To become a community sponsor groups must:
 - be a registered charity or Community Interest Company.
 - have secured suitable affordable accommodation for two years.
 - have at least £9,000.
 - have consent from the local authority that their application is approved in principle.
 - apply to the Home Office for their application to be approved.
- 4.3 Under the scheme a community sponsor is responsible for:

- finding a property that will be available for two years.
 - providing resettlement support for one year.
 - meeting a household at the airport.
 - providing a warm welcome and cultural orientation.
 - supporting access to medical, social, welfare, and education services
 - English language tuition.
 - Support towards volunteering, employment, self-sufficiency, independence and safeguarding support.
- 4.4 For any community sponsorship scheme there will be a 9-month review meeting, the Home Office will decide with the sponsors and GBC about on-going support needs of the family and how they will be met from 12 months onwards. If the sponsors end their support after one year, they must have a suitable transition plan for the family at the 12-month point and GBC will liaise with them at the end of 12 months to consider if the family requires additional support.
- 4.5 Direct funding after 12 months is available for GBC to claim but will be determined on a case-by-case basis. Funding may also be available in the event that new support needs arise which cannot be met by the sponsors or they feel unable to sustain support. However, in the case of Resettle@Guildford, they have given no indication that they will be unable to see out their sponsorship and intend to remain on a voluntary basis in a supporting role with the household.
- 4.6 All sponsors have to confirm the suitability of their Safeguarding Policy with lead officers at Surrey's Safeguarding Boards for both Children and Adults and make contact with local schools in respect of available school places and Surrey County Council officers have confirmed that places are likely to be available.

5. Consultations

- 5.1 There has been no external consultation to this report. Colleagues from the Children, Families and Lifelong learning Directorate in SCC have liaised with the Head of Community Services at GBC and agreed that all paperwork and governance is in place with Resettle@Guildford. Our private sector services team has also inspected the property which will accommodate the family if the Home Office approve and confirm it meets all necessary standards. This would be done for every sponsorship application.

6. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 6.1 The Equalities Impact Assessment undertaken by the Home Office and SCC identifies positive impacts. The VPRS is specifically for the most vulnerable refugees from Syria and surrounding areas, including refugee women who are at risk and survivors of violence, children, older and disabled people and those with medical needs. It aims to protect refugees at risk due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. The Neighbourhood Police are notified of households that are resettled and should any negative incidents occur they will be notified along with the Surrey Prevent Team.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 Financial assistance is provided in the form of grant assistance by the Home Office. Effectively the VPRS is cost neutral and we bear no direct cost for the VPRS. There is no short-term financial implication to the Council from the VPRS scheme, as grant funding will be received in the first year. There is also potential for Home Office

support after the first year that will alleviate any short to medium term funding pressures on the Council as the programme is designed to support families for up to 5 years. Beyond this however, the financial implication for the Council is difficult to ascertain as this will depend on public services required by resettled families and the number requiring one form of support or other.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1 There will be a legal duty for SCC to assess and provide support in respect to any special educational needs, and any adult and children social care needs. There will also be a legal duty to provide school places to children of compulsory school age.
- 8.3 As part of the process GBC is asked to support by arranging an inspection of the proposed accommodation by the Environmental Health Team which has been done and support engagement of relevant partners, such as the police, education providers, Job Centres and Clinical Commissioning Groups which we will do should the Home Office approve the application.

9. Human Resource Implications

- 9.1 Support of community sponsorship programmes can be absorbed by the Head of Community Services and the Family Support Team. Currently we have one application and hence there is no impact on the service we deliver. Should far more applications be presented, we may need to review the impact on the Family Support Team.

10. Conclusion

- 10.1 The Home Office is encouraging Community Sponsorship in response to the desire of local communities to play a greater role in refugee resettlement. It is a model that has been used in Canada since 1976 and has been piloted in Australia, Switzerland, Germany, and Ireland and more recently in Italy, New Zealand, and the UK.
- 10.2 Community Sponsorship enables local community groups to take responsibility to welcome and support refugees directly into their communities and complements the resettlement work that our family support team are already undertaking.
- 10.3 In approving the application and delegating authority to the Director of Service Delivery in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Community and Housing to give consent to future applications, we are enabling community sponsorship programmes to support our corporate aim of helping our most vulnerable and empowering communities to live well.

11. Background Papers

[Community Sponsorship LA guidance.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/614441/Community_Sponsorship_LA_guidance.pdf)

12. Appendices

None