

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL: WEDNESDAY 21 OCTOBER 2015

HOUSING OF REFUGEES FROM SYRIA

REPORT OF THE JOINT HEAD OF REVENUES & HOUSING SUPPORT

(Contact: Jon Dearing, - Tel (01993) 861221)

1. PURPOSE

To seek authority to take the necessary steps to secure the housing of six refugee families from Syria in the period to June 2016.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (a) That support be given to the making of an offer to government for six refugee families to be taken in West Oxfordshire, in three phases (December 2015; and March and May/June 2016); and
- (b) That the Head of Revenues and Housing Support be authorised, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Members for Communities and Housing and Leisure and Health, to take the necessary steps to secure the housing of those families in the period to June 2016.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. The Government has committed to receive 20,000 Syrian refugees over the period of the current Parliament (including 1,000 by the end of December 2015). Refugees will be given leave to remain in the UK for five years, with full recourse to public funds. The Home Office is looking for all Local Authorities to contribute to this national effort and West Oxfordshire District Council was one of the first to form a group to lead on this issue and has been at the forefront of the County-wide planning processes.
- 3.2. The Home Office's latest advice is that the need is around families and single males. There is currently limited need in relation to Syrian orphans and unaccompanied children, as the UN believes that they have a much better chance of locating the parents/closest relatives of these children if they accommodate and care for them at/near the camps where they first presented themselves.
- 3.3. The Refugee group has been keeping Members informed of developments and the activities of the County-wide approach. Press releases have been keeping residents up to date and there is a depository of useful information on the Council's Website.
- 3.4. Housing may be provided via the private rented sector. However, should it prove necessary for nominations to be made to one or more registered social landlords in the District, the approved Housing Nominations Policy does not provide for nominations in these circumstances. Accordingly, this report requests explicit and separate authority, which has been referred to Council because Cabinet can only make decisions which are in line with Policy.
- 3.5. Prior to the next occasion when changes to the Nominations Policy are recommended, consideration will be given to whether it might be appropriate to incorporate additional provisions giving a greater degree of flexibility in special or

exceptional circumstances. It is not possible to pre-judge the likelihood of that but, obviously, any such proposals would be subject to approval by Council.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1. The Council's proposal to the Home Office will include a bid for some grant funding to cover the cost of receiving, housing and supporting the families for at least 12 months from the date of their arrival.

4.2. As the refugees will have full recourse to public funds, their on-going housing costs will be covered by Housing Benefit until such time that the Council can assist them to secure employment.

5. RISKS

There is a reputational risk around the fact that the Council may need to utilise Social Sector housing. However, the impact will be minimised by the phased approach (two families in December; two by March and a further two by May 2016) and our objective of utilising the Private Rented Sector where availability exists.

6. REASONS

This report has been brought forward at the request of the Leader and relevant Cabinet Members to ensure an appropriate response to the current refugee crisis.

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Date: 16 October 2015

Background Papers:
None