

Part A

Report to: Cabinet
Date of meeting: 4 July 2016
Report of: Head of Community & Customer Services
Title: Contract for the support of Syrian refugees

1.0 **Summary**

- 1.1 On the 14 October 2015 the Council took the decision to take part in the national initiative to assist Syrian Refugees. The Council has procured properties to assist the first cohort of arrivals. We are required to provide intensive support to households coming through the programme.
- 1.2 We have worked closely with 7 other Hertfordshire district councils to negotiate support provision with a nationally recognised provider, the Refugee Council. We have entered into a contract with them, which is fully funded from the grant coming from the Home Office.
- 1.3 There was an urgent need to establish arrangements to receive families, which left insufficient time to go through a formal tendering of the support element. The exemptions route has been used to approve the letting of this contract. The exemptions procedure requires Cabinet to be informed of all such decisions.

2.0 **Recommendations**

- 2.1 Cabinet are asked to note the contents of the report.

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Report approved by: Alan Gough, Head of Housing & Community Services

3.0 **Detailed Proposal**

- 3.1 The Syrian vulnerable persons scheme was launched in January 2014. The scheme was relatively small in scope and the number of individuals moved through the scheme were in the hundreds. On the 7 September 2015 the Government announced the decision to accept 20,000 Syrian refugees over the next 5 years.
- 3.2 Families and individuals are selected for the Syrian Resettlement Programme by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) if they have a particular vulnerability or other need to live in the country. The criteria that the UNHCR use are:
- women and girls at risk;
 - survivors of violence and/or torture;
 - refugees with legal and/or physical protection needs;
 - refugees with medical needs or disabilities;
 - children and adolescents at risk;
 - persons at risk due to their sexual orientation or gender identity; and
 - refugees with family links in resettlement countries.
- 3.3 All Councils were asked what capacity they had to assist refugees. On the 14 October 2015 at the full Council meeting Members agreed that we should support the scheme to resettle Syrian refugees, and gave authority to the Head of Community and Customer Services to work with a range of partners to this end. This is consistent with what other Councils have agreed and within the County 9 out of the 10 District Councils are supporting the scheme.
- 3.4 The commitment that Watford has made is to accept 50 individuals over the 5 years of the scheme, or around 10 individuals a year. To date the Council has accepted 3 families, comprising of 11 individuals.
- 3.5 The Home Office has set out the requirements to take part in the scheme which stipulates what should be provided, including support and access to services such as ESOL (English as a Second Language). Given that many of the families come from war torn areas with often little or no grasp of English, or familiarity with the culture and society to which they will be moved. To make the move successful high levels of support are needed, particularly in the first year.

The details of what is required from the Home Office in its 'Statement of Requirements' is set out in Appendix 1.

- 3.6 Discussions had taken place, amongst the 9 Districts in the County that had agreed to accept Syrian refugees, regarding how best to support Syrian refugees. Only one of the Councils considered that they had sufficient local resources to properly support refugees. The remaining 8 Councils agreed that additional support would need to be

arranged. Although at this point there was insufficient time to go through a full procurement exercise.

- 3.7 Discussions have taken place with the Refugee Council. The Refugee Council is a charity that operates nationally with substantial experience of supporting the resettlement of refugees.
- 3.8 We have entered into a contract with the Refugee Council. The term of the contract is for a year starting from the 27 April 2016, with the recognition that each refugee will be supported for a 12 month period from the point of arrival. Therefore a refugee arriving near the end of the contract term would receive the same level of support as those arriving sooner. This contract does not cover refugees arriving after 26 April 2017, unless the contract has been extended or varied to cover such circumstances.
- 3.9 The contract value is expected to be in the region of £41k for the first year. This is fully funded through the grant provided by the Home Office.
- 3.10 Due to the urgent need to have a contract in place to be able to support the arrival of the first refugees the exceptional circumstances provisions of the exemptions to the contract procedure rules were invoked and the letting of the contract to the Refugee Council was approved by the Head of Community and Client Services and Managing Director. As required by the rules this is being reported to Cabinet for information.

4.0 **Implications**

4.1 **Financial**

- 4.1.1 The Head of Finance (shared services) comments that the costs of this proposal are fully funded from a Home Office grant. Should that grant be subsequently withdrawn then a budget pressure would arise and a budget growth bid to council would have to be made in future years.

4.2 **Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)**

- 4.2.1 The Head of Democracy and Governance comments that the legal implications are contained within the report

4.3 **Equalities**

- 4.3.1 The equalities impacts have been reviewed and it is considered that there are no negative impacts on those with protected characteristics. Given the focus on assisting vulnerable people it is likely that there will be a positive impact given the selection criteria as set out in paragraph 3.2 above. The criteria for the scheme include: women and girls at risk; people with disabilities; children and adolescents at risk; and those at risk due to sexual orientation and gender identity.

4.4 Potential Risks

Potential Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Overall score
The Contractor fails to deliver contract commitments. This risk will be mitigated through regular contact liaison meetings.	1	3	3

Appendices

Appendix 1: Home Office Requirements for the Syrian Refugee Programme

Background Papers

No papers were used in the preparation of this report.

File Reference

None