

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE - 7 SEPTEMBER 2020

PART I – NOT DELEGATED

REFUGEE MOTION FUNDING (DCES)

1 Summary

- 1.1 On 1 September 2020 Council is due to hear a motion proposed by Councillor Alex Michaels for the Council to resettle 20 refugees within the district (full motion found at appendix one). If Council agree the motion for the Council to resettle more refugees, there is a requirement for an additional £20,000 per year to be provided to Housing Services. If agreed, it is requested that this resource is provided by way of a part-time resource.

2 Details

- 2.1 If the motion is agreed, it is understood that the intention will be to secure housing in the private rented sector, preferably at Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates. If this is not possible then there will be a requirement for Policy and Resources Committee to approve a higher rental rate prior to confirming acceptance of the property.
- 2.2 The Home Office funding requirements mean that any properties secured must be within the district of the accepting Local Authority. It should be noted that properties at the LHA rate within Three Rivers are minimal and so often the Housing team will find private rentals outside of the district in order to house homeless households that are in temporary accommodation and owed a duty by the Council.
- 2.3 Potentially, this could mean that existing residents would be housed outside of the district in order to accommodate refugees or that households may need to stay in temporary accommodation longer because a private rental has been offered to refugees rather than them.
- 2.4 It is noted in the motion that the Housing team are responsible for pre-arrival of the refugees and post arrival it is suggested that Community Partnerships take over responsibility. However, as the Head of Community Partnerships is currently away from work and a member of the team is acting up, there are capacity issues for them to be the lead for the refugees post arrival. Following the Head of Housing Services discussing this with the Acting Head of Community Partnerships it is felt that the responsibility for the refugees post arrival should remain with the Housing team but that they will work in collaboration with the Community Partnerships team.
- 2.5 As the Housing team are also operating at full capacity, the additional £20,000 per year would be required in the form of a part-time resource, to manage the refugees pre and post arrival.
- 2.6 The new resource will be responsible for securing and preparing the properties pre-arrival. They will be the point of contact for the refugees and other agencies that will support them. They will ensure that the tenancies are managed effectively, ensuring that any issues are resolved in a timely manner. They will also be responsible for claiming the Home Office grant at the required intervals to ensure that the Council receives the monies available through the programme.

2.7 Due to current pressures within the Housing team and the ongoing pandemic, it is suggested that refugees do not arrival until the new financial year, 2021/22. This will also allow the team sufficient time for recruitment.

3 Options and Reasons for Recommendations

3.1 If Council agree the motion for the Council to resettle more refugees, it is recommended that a part-time resource be approved to be recruited into the Housing Services team as the team is already at full capacity.

3.2 It is recommended that the management of refugees pre and post arrival remains with the Housing team, but work in collaboration with the Community Partnerships team.

3.3 Due to recruitment timescales and existing pressures, it is recommended that the resettlement programme does not begin until the new financial year of 2021/22.

4 Policy/Budget Reference and Implications

4.1 At the time of writing, the recommendations in this report are not within the Council's agreed policy and budgets, as the recommendations are based on a motion being considered at Full Council on 1 September 2020.

5 Financial Implications

5.1 It is understood that the motion includes the requirement for an additional £20,000 per annum. The £20,000 is based on a need for additional resourcing in order to resettle 20 refugees in the district. If this is not provided but the motion agreed, this will have an impact on the deliverability of statutory functions in the Housing service.

5.2 The below table indicates the additional £20,000 per annum for staffing costs within the Housing team (cost code 1112). It is based on resettlement beginning in 2021/22.

REVENUE IMPLICATION	Current Year 2020/21 £	2021/22 £	2022/23 £	Future Years per annum £
Revenue				
Expenditure	0	20,000	20,000	20,000
Income/savings	0	0	0	0
Net Commitment	0	20,000	20,000	20,000

6 Legal, Equal Opportunities, Staffing, Environmental, Community Safety, Public Health, Customer Services Centre, Communications & Website, Risk Management and Health & Safety Implications

6.1 None specific.

7 Recommendation

7.1 That Policy and Resources Committee agree:

- 7.1.1 To an additional part-time resource being recruited into the Housing Services team, subject to Full Council agreeing the motion for the Council to resettle more refugees;
- 7.1.2 The management of refugees pre and post arrival remains with the Housing team, but work in collaboration with the Community Partnerships team;
- 7.1.3 The resettlement programme does not begin until the new financial year of 2021/22.

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Data Quality

Data sources: N/A

Data checked by: N/A

Data rating: N/A

Background Papers

None

APPENDICES / ATTACHMENTS

Appendix One – Refugee motion on Full Council agenda for 1 September 2020

Appendix One – Refugee motion on Full Council agenda for 1 September 2020

Councillor Alex Michaels, seconded by Councillor Joy Mann, to move under Notice duly given as follows:

Further Amended Motion received on 28 July 2020 to be moved and debated at Extraordinary Council on 1 September 2020

This Council notes that:

Recent conflicts in the Middle East have created the largest refugee crisis in generations.

Thousands of people have died while seeking sanctuary from the violence this year alone trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea; many of them were children. The UN estimates there are over 320,000 people though who live in urgent need of resettlement.

The UK has a long and important tradition of offering sanctuary to those who need protection. 100,000 Huguenots, 10,000 Jewish Kinder transport children spared the Nazi concentration camps, 160,000 Poles following the Second World War many of whom had served in the Battle of Britain, the Vietnamese Boat People, the 28,000 Asian Ugandans fleeing Idi Amin and the people who fled the war in Kosovo. This is our proud and decent tradition.

This Council resolves to:

Formally express an interest in both the VPR and Gateway programmes to the Home Office (or if predated by the UK Resettlement Scheme), requesting that 20 refugees be resettled here. We will limit this to five families unless agreed by the Policy and Resources (P&R) Committee to extend this further. The Council take refugees on the basis of this scheme being 100% funded via the Home Office, with the first five years fully funded. The Council further notes that the scheme has been successful across the Country on this basis. While the housing team plans and prepares for a family to arrive, they do this in collaboration with the community's team who are the team that manage the programme post arrival as their contact network is much more valuable to new families.

That the Council buys refugee specialist casework support for at least three years from the Refugee Council who deliver the service for most of the county of Hertfordshire. The council further notes Watford & Three River Refugee Partnership are a local group with relevant expertise as well as Herts Welcomes Refugees who can provide additional support as needed. The specialist refugee casework is funded by the Home office grant which pays additional support costs such as education and furniture thus reducing further any costs on Three Rivers District Council (TRDC).

That although housing needs to be procured through the private sector, housing is preferably secured from a philanthropic landlord who can offer to rent the house at LHA rates. If this is not possible housing must be capped at LHA rates. If housing exceeds LHA rates permission must be secured via Council prior to placing the refugees. Otherwise housing is rented privately and funded by the scheme, not by TRDC or via TRDC stock for the 5 year duration.

That the families are encouraged to make use of the new 'Well-being and work for refugee integration' project which is available until December 2022 and will support adults with low level mental health needs and prevent them from escalating and will also prepare them for the UK workplace. If this model of support is effective, tariff money can be committed to enable it to be developed after 2022.

Costs for this scheme will be £20k over 5 years per family (£4,000 per annum) in additional staffing costs for the TRDC housing team. This includes an initial three month period finding

housing and ongoing 2 days per month management. These costs have been provided by the housing team and the CFO. We will cap the number of families at 5 which limits the total annual cost to £20,000. Subject to available resources any additional costs are budgeted for by P&R as required. Subject to the resources being available we commit to taking refugees on the terms of this motion.

The Council notes that the initial funding is for 5 years, in which time the refugees will be able to seek work to support themselves beyond this time. Council notes that this government strategy has been successful in other parts of the country and expect with the right support from TRDC, Refugee Council and other voluntary organisations there will be no further costs to fund. TRDC will be wholly responsible after 5 years to seek further funding and grants via the home office and other organisations if needed.

To commit to ensuring that refugees are welcomed in this area and help facilitate this process by coordinating local service provision and coordinating the immense public will to help.