

# AMENDED AGENDA

## POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING



Date: Wednesday 16 December 2015  
Time: 6.30 pm  
Venue: Town Hall, High Street,  
Maidstone

Membership:

Councillors Mrs Blackmore, Brice, Chittenden,  
Cox, Garland, Mrs Joy, McKay,  
McLoughlin, Munford, Naghi, Ross,  
Round, Sargeant, Mrs Stockell and  
Mrs Wilson (Chairman)

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Page No.

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Notification of Substitute Members
3. Urgent Items
4. Notification of Visiting Members
5. Disclosures by Members and Officers

**Continued Over/:**

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**Issued on Tuesday 15 December 2015**

The reports included in Part I of this agenda can be made available in **alternative formats**. For further information about this service, or to arrange for special facilities to be provided at the meeting, **please contact Caroline Matthews on 01622 602743**. To find out more about the work of the Committee, please visit [www.maidstone.gov.uk](http://www.maidstone.gov.uk)

*Alison Broom*

**Alison Broom, Chief Executive, Maidstone Borough Council,  
Maidstone House, King Street, Maidstone Kent ME15 6JQ**

6. Disclosures of Lobbying
7. To consider whether any items should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information.
8. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 25 November 2015
9. Presentation of Petitions (if any)
10. Questions and answer session for members of the public (if any)
11. Report of the Head of Finance and Resources - Medium Term Financial Strategy 2016-17 Onwards
12. Report of the Head of Finance and Resources - Council Tax - Tax Base 2016-17
13. Report of the Head of Finance and Resources - Projected Collection Fund Adjustment Account 2015/16
14. Oral Report of the Head of Finance and Resources - Provisional Financial Settlement (if necessary)
15. Report of the Head of Planning and Development - Town Centre Strategic Development Plan 2015-2020
16. **Urgent Reference from Communities, Housing and Environment Committee 8 December 2015: Maidstone's approach to the Syrian refugee crisis** 1 - 21

## **PART II**

**To move that the public be excluded for the items set out in Part II of the Agenda because of the likely disclosure of exempt information for the reasons specified having applied the Public Interest Test.**

### **Head of Schedule 12 A and Brief Description**

- |                                                                                                                        |                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| 17. Report of the Director of Planning and Development - Business Plan for land and property following its acquisition | Paragraph 3 – Info re financial/business affairs |
| 18. Report of the Director of Planning and Development - Development of the Mall                                       | Paragraph 3 – Info re financial/business affairs |

**POLICY AND RESOURCES  
COMMITTEE**

**25 November 2015**

Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?

**Yes**

**Urgent Reference from Communities, Housing and Environment Committee 8 December 2015: Maidstone's approach to the Syrian refugee crisis**

<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	Policy and Resources Committee
<b>Lead Head of Service</b>	John Littlemore, Head of Housing and Community Services
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Ellie Kershaw, Housing and Inclusion Manager
<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Wards affected</b>	

**This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:**

That Policy and Resources Committee consider the Reference from Communities, Housing and Environment Committee due to the budgetary implications and the potential capital spend associated with the report.

The recommendations as presented to Communities, Housing and Environment Committee are as follows:-

- 1) That Maidstone Borough Council commits to take part in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme;
- 2) That, as per 4.1, the Council's offer is 6 single males over the five year period, to be reviewed periodically with an aim of increasing this through the lifetime of the scheme if viable;
- 3) That the Council investigate options for the provision of housing including the purchase of property from capital funds;
- 4) That households should be accepted as soon as suitable housing is available; and
- 5) That if the recommendation at 4.1 is agreed, a periodic review is undertaken, with a view to increasing the offer throughout the life of the scheme if it is running successfully and thought to be viable.

**This report relates to the following corporate priorities:**

- Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all

**Timetable**

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Policy and Resources Committee	16 December 2015

# **Urgent Reference from Communities, Housing and Environment Committee 8 December 2015: Maidstone's approach to the Syrian refugee crisis**

## **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1.1 This reference relates to a report that was presented to the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee on 8 December 2015.

## **2. REASONS FOR URGENCY**

2.1 Any delay in the proposed participation of the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme could have a bearing on this Council's ability to take in Syrian refugees from April 2016.

## **3. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

3.1 At its meeting on 8 December 2015 the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee were presented with a report which sought approval for the Council to assist Syrian refugees.

3.2 Concern was expressed by Members that one of the recommendations required that the Council investigate options for the provision of housing for the Syrian refugees, including the purchase of property from capital funds.

3.3 Although it was within the remit of the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee to purchase from capital funds, the increase in homelessness had already impacted on its capital funds and additional resources had already been requested from Policy and Resources Committee and this could create an additional burden should there be a need to purchase a property. Therefore, for the sake of consistency, the Committee voted to refer this matter to Policy and Resources Committee. A copy of the report is attached as Appendix 'A' for ease of reference.

## **4. AVAILABLE OPTIONS**

4.1 The Committee could decide not to agree to take the recommendations and refer them back to Communities, Housing and Environment Committee with the caveat that should it be decided that accommodation to house these individuals were necessary then that particular issue should be referred to Policy and Resources Committee.

4.2 Alternatively the Committee could consider all the recommendations as detailed in the original report, which have been replicated on the front page of this report as well as in Appendix A. This would ensure that there is not any further delay for the Council accommodating these individuals from April 2015.

## **5. REPORT APPENDICES**

The following document is to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix A: Copy of the Report of the Housing and Community Services, presented to Communities, Housing and Environment Committee

Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?

**Yes**

**Maidstone’s approach to the Syrian refugee crisis**

<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	Communities, Housing and Environment
<b>Lead Head of Service</b>	John Littlemore
<b>Lead Officer and Report Author</b>	Ellie Kershaw
<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Wards affected</b>	

**This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:**

1. That Maidstone Borough Council commits to take part in the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme.
2. That, as per 4.1, the council’s offer is 6 single males over the five year period, to be reviewed periodically with an aim of increasing this through the lifetime of the scheme if viable.
3. That the council investigate options for the provision of housing including the purchase of property from capital funds.
4. That households should be accepted as soon as suitable housing is available.
5. That if the recommendation at 4.1 is agreed, a periodic review is undertaken, with a view to increasing the offer throughout the life of the scheme if it is running successfully and thought to be viable.

**This report relates to the following corporate priorities:**

- Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all

**Timetable**

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Communities, Housing and Environment	8 <sup>th</sup> December 2015

# Maidstone's approach to the Syrian refugee crisis

## 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Purpose of the report is to seek the Committee's approval for Maidstone Borough Council to assist Syrian Refugees, as outlined by the Prime Minister in October 2015.
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## 2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

### 2.1 National Context

- 2.1.1 Due to the ongoing situation in Syria, the Government has expanded the existing Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme (VPR), and intends to resettle 20,000 Syrians in need of protection between now and 2020. It is expected that this will be at a rate of several hundred per month.
- 2.1.2 The scheme is based on need, prioritising those who cannot be effectively supported in their region of origin, such as women and girls at risk, people in severe need of medical care, survivors of torture and violence, those at risk due to their sexuality or gender identity and refugees with family links in the UK. Referrals will be made in the first instance to the Home Office, who will check that they meet the criteria, and carry out medical and security checks. Once verified, these will be passed to the Local Authority who will be asked to accept or reject the case. Once accepted, the Local Authority will take responsibility for all aspects of the resettlement, including housing, education, health and any other needs such as interpretation services.
- 2.1.3 Refugees will initially be given a five year leave to remain in the UK and will have full entitlement to benefits on arrival. Whilst it is expected that many will then wish to make the UK their permanent home, previous schemes have also shown that a number of people wish to return when their place of origin is safer to assist with rebuilding.
- 2.1.4 There are 12.2 million people in Syria in need of humanitarian assistance, and four in every five live in poverty. There are many human rights violations, attacks against densely populated areas and targeting of civilian infrastructure.
- 2.1.5 So far 266 Syrians have been relocated to the UK under the VPR scheme, in addition to almost 5,000 Syrians (including dependants) who have been granted protection under normal asylum rules since the crisis began in April 2011.

## 2.2 Kent context

2.2.1 Kent County Council has a responsibility for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). Kent has the highest population of UASC in the country by some way, and has started asking authorities in other areas to assist. Due to the high numbers of UASC, which has increased significantly in the last few months, and the demand that this places on services such as education, health and mental health, KCC has said that it would not be willing to take any families in Kent who have children with high support needs, or unaccompanied children. All district councils have agreed to this.

2.2.2 When UASC leave care, they require an appropriate form of housing. Initially this may be in supported lodgings or semi independent accommodation provided by KCC. However, at some point between the ages of 18 and 21, they will require support to access their own accommodation, which requires involvement from the district housing team. Care leavers are a priority need group, meaning that in the vast majority of cases they will be owed the main housing duty under the Homelessness legislation. This puts a requirement on the district to provide temporary accommodation if needed, and then assist the individual in finding a property in either the social or private sector. Maidstone has the fourth highest level of UASC in Kent and this also needs to be taken into account when agreeing the number of refugees the council can assist. A breakdown of distribution across Kent can be found at Appendix A.

2.2.3 One of the biggest concerns for Maidstone at the moment is the increase in homelessness and the lack of available, affordable property for household, particularly families, to move into. As of the end of Quarter 2, 313 homelessness decisions had been made, which is slightly higher than the same period last year. There are currently 95 households in some form of temporary accommodation, 57 of whom are owed the main housing duty. This number has been steadily rising and is due to the lack of available accommodation for households to move into.

2.2.4 Local Housing Allowance rates in Maidstone (the amount housing benefit will pay for a property per week) are shown below.

Size	LHA	Private rent *
Shared accommodation	£68.28	
1 bed	£123.58	£155
2 bed	£157.56	£200
3 bed	£180.45	£254
4 bed	£235.41	£316

\*[Home.co.uk](http://Home.co.uk) Maidstone market rent summary

Single people under 35 are only entitled to the shared accommodation rate, regardless of whether they live in something larger.

2.2.5 This upward trend in terms of homelessness means that housing is a key consideration when deciding the make up and numbers of refugees which Maidstone Borough Council could assist under this scheme.

2.2.6 As each referral is received, a panel discussion to include health and education will be held to ensure that the needs of the household can be met before they are accepted.

### 2.3 Considerations

- 2.3.1 Each council has discretion to not only decide on the number of refugees they will assist, but also to set parameters as to the type of household (household make up, level of need etc). Once a household is accepted, there is a high level of work involved in settling them. This includes any interpretation and translation needs, registering with a GP, registering with the jobcentre and any other agencies that may be required. In material terms, accommodation must be found and furnished to a basic standard. The council plans to ask for support from the community and relevant local businesses in order to keep the costs of this down so that the funding can be utilised in ongoing support. The household must also be provided with a cash amount, and an initial shop.
- 2.3.2 This initial introduction will take approximately two weeks of officer time for each refugee. It is anticipated that this role will be met from existing resources within the Housing and Inclusion Team. This will have an impact on the day to day service of that team which will have to be considered, as this will effectively leave the team one member short for that period. A virtual Team Leader will also be appointed who will be responsible for the co-ordination of the work referred to at 2.3.1.
- 2.3.3 Each household will require a single point of contact, who will liaise with agencies on their behalf. Often they will have a mistrust of authority figures such as the Police, so it is important that they develop confidence with their point of contact. Support services could be accessed via the existing KCC contract with Rethink Sahayak, that already works with migrants. This contract currently runs until March 2017.
- 2.3.4 It is unlikely that information will be available about the skills refugees possess to enable them to seek employment. However, Maidstone has skills gaps across the board, so it should be possible to find suitable employment for anyone who is able to work.
- 2.3.5 At a recent seminar held by Centre on Migration- Policy and Society, it was suggested that use of mainstream services, with language support is the best way for refugees to integrate rather than commissioning separate services.
- 2.3.6 Integrating refugees will be hugely important to the success of the programme. The council will meet with parties who can offer advice, such as the Imam of Maidstone Mosque and representatives from the Gurkha community. The voluntary and community sector will form an important part of this integration. It would also be beneficial to look at a work experience/volunteering programme for those refugees who have the necessary language skills.

- 2.3.7 A welcome pack will be created for each household, the contents of which are to be determined, but could include small luxury items and pictorial information about Maidstone.
- 2.3.8 Members of the Housing and Communities Team are visiting other Authorities and agencies that have experience in this and similar schemes in order to learn lessons from them. A visit to Coventry led to them sending a large amount of useful information, including some which has been translated into Arabic.
- 2.3.9 There is some thinking that due to the funding levels (shown below) councils may be less incentivised to offer placements to single males. This could therefore be a real gap that Maidstone could fill.
- 2.3.10 When refugees arrive in the UK they have been through a two-stage vetting process to ensure it is known who is entering the country. Work is being done with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) who has their own robust identification process in place. This includes the taking of biometrics, documentary evidence and interviews. When cases are submitted by the UNHCR for consideration they are screened and considered by the Home Office for suitability for entry to the UK. This includes the taking of further biometric data. The right is retained to reject individuals on security, war crimes or other grounds, including where there is insufficient information to undertake effective screening.

## 2.4 Funding

- 2.4.1 Home Office has indicated that the funding provided will be as below

<b>UNIT COST FOR SYRIA VPR SCHEME</b>					
	<b>Adult Benefit Claimant</b>	<b>Other Adults</b>	<b>Children 5-18</b>	<b>Children 3-4</b>	<b>Children U-3</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Local Authority Costs	8,520	8,520	8,520	8,520	8,520
Education	0	0	4,500	2,250	0
Special Educational Needs	0	0	1,000	1,000	0
DWP Benefits	12,700	0	0	0	0
Primary medical care	200	200	200	200	200
Secondary medical care	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>23,420</b>	<b>10,720</b>	<b>16,220</b>	<b>13,970</b>	<b>10,720</b>

- 2.4.2 There is a commitment from the Home Office to provide funding for the full five years. However, the level has not been agreed. It is likely to be less than in the first year as it is anticipated that the needs of the household will reduce with time.

2.4.3 Adults will enter the country as refugees, meaning they have recourse to public funds from the day they enter the UK. This will include housing benefit.

2.4.4 The scheme is to be run in such a way as to ensure that the impact on revenue funding is minimised.

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### **3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS**

3.1 The first option is to accept families with needs as described in section 2. The advantage of this is that the funding received would be higher, and could therefore allow for more support to be commissioned, or a member of staff employed to work with these families. The disadvantage to this option is that, as stated, homelessness in Maidstone is increasing, and there is a severe shortage of family accommodation, particularly at the LHA rate. It would therefore both be difficult to source appropriate housing, and to prioritise refugee families above families to whom the council already owes the main housing duty. For this reason, this option is not recommended.

3.2 Option two is to accept single males. This would allow the council to place within shared accommodation, for which there are two options that can be further explored; a property owned by a local Church has been offered to the council to use as accommodation, though it would need some work before it was suitable. Alternatively, the council could use capital funding to buy houses that would be suitable as shared accommodation. This could be used later for placing other homeless households. The advantage of this option is that it would allow the council to place people in the same house, giving them a small community for support and allowing the council to make good use of support as it would be targeted to one place. The disadvantage to this option is the potential for people who do not get on to be placed in once house; however, this could in some way be mitigated through the referral process. This is the preferred option. If this option is agreed, it is recommended that the council's initial offer is to take six males over the five year period.

3.3 Option three is to not assist any refugees under the VPR scheme. It is believed that for humanitarian reasons, this is not a viable option. Colleagues across Kent are committed to taking various numbers of households, and therefore within the limitations stated in this report, it is appropriate for Maidstone to share the challenge of assisting the refugees.

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### **4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

4.1 The preferred option is that described in 3.2, that the council should make an offer of 6 single males over the five year period. With no previous experience in this area, it is felt that it would not be wise to make a higher offer at this point. As the scheme progresses and more is learned, it may be possible to increase this number.

## 5. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 5.1 The next step would be to make this offer, and to investigate suitable housing options.
- 5.2 Whilst this work is ongoing, contact will be made with community leaders and any agencies who may wish to be involved, to ensure that everyone is clear about their roles and responsibilities.
- 5.3 It is proposed that the council could start to accept referrals from April 2016- earlier if suitable housing can be identified more quickly.

## 6. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Implications</b>	<b>Sign-off</b>
<b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b>	Any work undertaken must take into account the wider community as well as the refugees. This will be assessed at each stage of planning.	[Head of Service or Manager]
<b>Risk Management</b>	Risks will be assessed throughout the programme, and managed by the Head of Housing and Community Services.	[Head of Service or Manager]
<b>Financial</b>	There will be financial implications. However, the full extent, is not known at this stage	[Section 151 Officer & Finance Team]
<b>Staffing</b>	The work will be undertaken within existing resources	[Head of Service]
<b>Legal</b>		[Legal Team]
<b>Equality Impact Needs Assessment</b>		[Policy & Information Manager]
<b>Environmental/Sustainable Development</b>		[Head of Service or Manager]
<b>Community Safety</b>	This will become clearer as referrals are made. The CSU will be included in planning.	[Head of Service or Manager]
<b>Human Rights Act</b>		[Head of Service or

		Manager]
<b>Procurement</b>		[Head of Service & Section 151 Officer]
<b>Asset Management</b>		[Head of Service & Manager]

**7. REPORT APPENDICES**

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix A: Distribution of UASC through Kent
- Appendix B: Home Office fact sheet on the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme.

Children in care	Ashford	Canterbury	Dartford	Dover	Gravesham	Maidstone	Medway	OLA	Sevenoaks	Shepway	Swale	Thanet	Tonbridge and Malling	Tunbridge Wells	Grand Total
H5 - Residential accommodation	114	33			6		2			1	1	2	1	37	<b>197</b>
P2 - Independent living	12	48	1	5	33	25	81	65		31	6	8		11	<b>326</b>
R2 - NHS/Health Trust								1							<b>1</b>
R5 - Young Offender Institution or prison							1								<b>1</b>
U1 - Foster placement with relative or friend- long term						1		1							<b>2</b>
U3 - Foster placement with relative or friend- not long term or FFA								1							<b>1</b>
U4 - Placement with other foster carer- long term fostering	3	10		6	2	3	3	2		12	3	8			<b>52</b>
U6 - Placement with other carer - not long term or FFA	4	20	3	17	7	11	17	33	1	17	20	23	13	5	<b>191</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>771</b>

Care Leavers	Not known	Ashford	Canterbury	Dartford	Dover	Gravesham	Maidstone	Medway	OLA	Sevenoaks	Shepway	Swale	Thanet	Tonbridge and Malling	Tunbridge Wells	Grand Total
B - With parents or relatives	1		3						10							<b>14</b>
H - Deported	1															<b>1</b>
R - Residence not known	5				1											<b>6</b>
S - No fixed abode/homeless	1					1		1			1					<b>4</b>
D - Semi-independent, transitional accommodation	3	5	23	2	1	20	16	22	6		10	2		1	6	<b>117</b>
E - Supported lodgings		1	1		1	2	3		5		2	2	2	1	1	<b>21</b>
K - Ordinary lodgings		1	2			1					2		1			<b>7</b>
Not Recorded	5	17	23	0	0	8	3	2	14	0	8	0	1	0	0	<b>81</b>
U - Independent living	2	8	13	5		25	8	13	22		2		5		5	<b>108</b>
V - Emergency accommodation	1															<b>1</b>
X - In custody	1					1			1			1				<b>4</b>
Y - Other accommodation			4			1	1	2	4		1				1	<b>14</b>

Z - With Former foster carers			1					1		1			1			4
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>382</b>



## Syrian Resettlement Programme

### How many additional people will you resettle?

- The Government will expand the existing Syrian Vulnerable Person Scheme and intends to resettle 20,000 Syrians in need of protection during this Parliament.
- The UK is at the forefront of the response to the crisis in Syria and this expansion is part of our comprehensive approach designed as far as possible to help refugees in the region but recognising that for some vulnerable people the only solution is to bring them to countries like the UK.

### How will the arrival of 20,000 be spread out?

- It will take several months to reach full capacity but when we do we would expect to bring in roughly several hundred refugees each month over the course of the Parliament, subject to continuing need and capacity.

### How else is the Government supporting Syrians in need of protection?

- Our priorities are on continuing to provide humanitarian aid to those most in need in the region and actively seeking an end to the crisis. We believe this approach is the best way to ensure that the UK's help has the greatest impact for the majority of refugees who remain in the region and their host countries.
- As the brutal conflict continues in Syria, millions of people continue to be in need. Hundreds of thousands have been killed in the conflict between the Assad regime, extremist groups and moderate opposition groups. In response to the crisis, the UK has allocated over £1.1 billion since 2012 to meet the immediate needs of vulnerable people in Syria and of refugees in the region – more than any other country in the world except the United States. The UK is the only major country in the world that has kept its promise of spending 0.7% of our national income on aid and we should be proud of this. By the end of March 2015, UK support had delivered over 18 million food rations, each of which feeds one person for one month, provided access to clean water for 1.6 million people (peak month), and over 2.4 million medical consultations in Syria and the region.

### How will the expansion of the programme operate?

- We already have significant experience of resettling vulnerable people and our existing domestic resettlement mechanisms provide a basis for a relatively quick increase in numbers. And we are already working with existing partners to ensure that we can begin to increase numbers as quickly as possible. Over the coming weeks and months, we will work with local authorities, the UNHCR and others to put in place the full structures to ensure we can scale up the current arrangements so that we can meet the aim of bringing up to 20,000 Syrians over the lifetime of this Parliament and deliver on the expansion that has been announced.

### **How long will the expansion take?**

- Although we have simplified the process as much as we can the UNHCR must still assess each individual case before referring them to the Home Office. The Home Office must conduct visa checks and at the same time a place must be found in a local authority. We do all this already but it is important we get it right and scaling up a system like this in a way that protects the interests of all concerned, including local communities, will take a little bit of time.

### **How do you choose who comes to the UK?**

- The Syrian VPR is based on need. It prioritises those who cannot be supported effectively in their region of origin: women and children at risk, people in severe need of medical care and survivors of torture and violence amongst others. We work closely with the UNHCR to identify cases that they deem in need of resettlement and we will continue this work to ensure we deliver our commitment to provide refuge to 20,000 Syrians.
- The UNHCR identifies people in need of resettlement based on the following criteria: 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.

### **How does the process work?**

- UNHCR refer cases to the Home Office. We check they meet our eligibility criteria and carry out medical and security checks. We arrange exit visas from the host country and entry visas into the UK. At the same time, we pass the cases to a local authority who has asked to participate in the scheme. The Local Authority is asked to accept or reject cases. The referral forms give detail on family make up, age and specific needs. Further detail on any medical needs will follow shortly after via a full medical health assessment report. On accepting a case, local authorities then need to arrange housing, school places etc. In parallel we would agree an arrival date. We are working to make this process as quick as possible.

### **What if an area is new to resettlement?**

- Local authorities will need to think carefully about whether they have the infrastructure and support networks needed to ensure the appropriate care and integration of these refugees. It would be worth speaking to existing resettlement areas to learn best practice. Regional Strategic Migration Partnerships can put you in touch.

### **How can local authorities find out more about the profiles and needs of the refugees they will be hosting?**

- All cases will differ and it is very difficult to generalise. We do not have detail of the cases before UNHCR refer them to us. As soon as a local authority wants to participate, we will send these referrals that give detailed information on the individual cases. If authorities want a particular make up of cases, they should state this and we will do our best to match cases.

### **Will the 20,000 be on top of existing schemes?**

- The Government will expand the existing Syrian VPR Scheme and we expect to resettle up to 20,000 Syrians in need of protection during this Parliament. This is in addition to those we resettle under Gateway and Mandate and the thousands who receive protection in the UK under normal asylum procedures.

### **How will these people be accommodated? Where will they go when they are here?**

- The UK has been operating resettlement schemes for many years and we already have established and effective networks to accommodate and support resettled people. However, we recognise that the increase in numbers will require an expansion of current networks and the impact on local communities and infrastructure will need to be managed carefully. That is why we are working with a wide range of partners including local authorities and civil society organisations to ensure that people are integrated sensitively into local communities.
- Our existing dispersal policy is aimed at ensuring an equitable distribution of refugees across the country so that no individual local authority bears a disproportionate share of the burden. We are working closely with local authorities to ensure that this remains the case.

### **How will you ensure refugees are dispersed fairly and in a way that manages the impacts on local communities and services?**

- We are determined to ensure that no local authority is asked to take more than the local structures are able to cope with. That is why we will be talking to local authorities and other partners over the coming weeks to ensure that capacity can be identified and the impact on those taking new cases can be managed in a fair and controlled way.

### **How will schools be supported to provide language support for refugee children?**

- Financial support for English as an Additional Language (EAL) pupils is a matter for local discretion. The funding arrangements enable local authorities to allocate a proportion of their funding to schools on the basis of the number of pupils in each school who have EAL and who have been in the school system for a maximum of three years. The pupil rate for this is also decided locally and can therefore reflect specific challenges in the area. Schools can also use the additional money they receive through the pupil premium to raise the attainment of disadvantaged EAL pupils.
- Local authorities have the freedom to take account of high migration in their local funding formula, to address the additional costs of having a large number (over 10%) of pupils arriving at unusual times in the school year.
- Schools can access information about good practice in meeting the needs of EAL pupils - Ofsted has published some case studies showing good practice at schools with high proportions of pupils with EAL. Resources are also available from the National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum, an organisation that seeks to promote effective teaching and learning for EAL pupils in UK schools.

### **How will you ensure that there are enough school places in areas where refugees are resettled?**

- We have committed to investing £7bn on new school places over the next six years, and in the last Parliament funding for school places doubled to £5bn to create 445,000 additional places. Local Authorities are allocated funding for school places based on their own local data on school capacity and pupil forecasts, in which they take account of factors including rising birth rates, housing development, trends in internal migration and migration to England from elsewhere in the United Kingdom and from overseas. We continue to work with LAs to make sure that every child has a school place.

### **How can I become a foster carer for a refugee child?**

- We are not expecting the refugees arriving in the first months of the scheme to include unaccompanied children, but if you are interested in finding out more about fostering, you might wish to contact your local authority. They can provide you with details about applying to foster for them. You can also find out more about fostering by contacting Fosterline, a government funded service providing independent advice and support for people considering becoming foster carers. In addition, you might wish to look at information about applying to foster that Fostering Network give on their website at: <http://www.couldyoufoster.org.uk/>.
- Further information for foster carers is also available on GOV.UK : <https://www.gov.uk/foster-carers>. This page sets out the process people should follow and explains how much financial support and training foster carers can get.

### **I am interested in adopting an unaccompanied refugee child?**

- We are not expecting the refugees arriving in the first months of the scheme to include unaccompanied children. Even if we do support unaccompanied children in the future it is unlikely that adoption will be an appropriate option for these children. The United Nations and other humanitarian charities advise that no new adoption applications should be considered in the period after a disaster or from a war zone before the authorities in that State are in a position to apply the necessary safeguards. This is especially true when civil authority breaks down or temporarily ceases to function.
- It is not uncommon in an emergency or unsettled situation for children to be temporarily separated from their parents or other family members who may be looking for them. Moreover, parents may send their children out of the area for their safety. Premature and unregulated attempts to organise the adoption of such a child abroad should be avoided and resisted with efforts to reunite children with relatives or extended family being given priority. So whilst some lone refugee children may come to the UK for temporary care, we would wish to support them to be reunited with their parents or other relatives where this is possible.

### **How can people help now?**

- People can already make donations to charities and volunteer to help local refugee support groups. We would encourage that to continue but we will also be consulting partners on options to do more - including ways to sponsor refugees alongside those supported by the government.
- People can also refer to the Government release on the GOV.UK website <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/syria-refugees-what-you-can-do-to-help--2>

The British Red Cross has created a Crisis Helpline on 0800 107 8727 to triage calls to appropriate organisations.

## Key facts and statistics on resettlement

- The UK operates three resettlement routes, Gateway, Mandate and the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) Scheme, working closely with the UNHCR on each. The Gateway programme has run for 10 years and has resettled almost 6,400 people in that time, and aims to resettle around 750 people a year.
- On the VPR, we are working closely with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to identify some of the most vulnerable displaced Syrians and bring them to the UK.
- The scheme is helping those in the greatest need who cannot be supported effectively in the region by giving them protection and support in the UK – the scheme prioritises people requiring urgent medical treatment, survivors of torture and violence, and women and children at risk. The current criteria for acceptance under the scheme will be expanded to ensure more of those in the greatest need are resettled in the UK.
- Since the first arrivals in March 2014 to the end of June 2015 (the last published figures), 216 people were relocated to the UK under the Syrian VPR scheme.
- Since the crisis began in 2011 we have granted asylum or other forms of leave to almost 5,000 Syrian nationals and dependants through normal asylum procedures.
- In response to the increase in asylum claims, the UK introduced a concession in October 2012 for Syrian nationals who are already legally present in the UK, allowing them to extend their leave or change immigration category without leaving the UK. This currently runs to 28 February 2016.

## How does the current Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme work?

The UK sets the criteria and then UNHCR identifies and submits potential cases for our consideration. Cases are screened and considered on the papers and we retain the right to reject on security, war crimes or other grounds. Once the screening process has been completed a full medical assessment is conducted by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in the host country. Full details of the case and medical history are sent to the local authority for assessment of need, including whether suitable accommodation and care are available locally. The local authority then provides details of the estimated costs.

Eligibility is then confirmed and IOM start the visa application process. UK Visas and Immigration International issue UK visas (3 months Leave Outside of the Rules) and on arrival, arrangements are made for Biometric Residence Permits to be issued with 5 years' humanitarian protection.

## Worldwide trends

### How many refugees are there worldwide?

- The UNHCR reports that by the end of 2014, the number of forcibly displaced individuals worldwide stood at 59.5 million. There are 19.5 million refugees worldwide. 51% of refugees were under 18 years old.

### Where do most refugees come from?

- Syria is the world's largest source country of both internally displaced people (7.6 million) and refugees (3.88 million at the end of 2014). Afghanistan (2.59 million) and Somalia (1.1 million) are the next biggest refugee source countries. This is followed by Sudan (648,900) and South Sudan (616,200).

### What are the reasons for refugee flows?

- The humanitarian situation in **Syria** continues to deteriorate. The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance now stands at 12.2 million, and four in every five Syrians live in poverty. Flagrant human rights violations, indiscriminate attacks against densely populated areas and targeting of civilian infrastructure, in particular aerial bombardment by the Assad regime, continues in violation of international norms.
- **Afghanistan** remains one of the poorest countries in the world, with 1 in 3 people living below the poverty line and without access to basic services or opportunities to support their families. The ongoing insurgency across many parts of the country means people are facing violence as part of their daily lives and has given rise to a sharp increase in population displacement. As of December 2014, UNHCR listed over 2.5m Afghans as refugees and over 800,000 Afghans are internally displaced.
- **Somalis** are the third largest group, following Eritreans and Sudanese, arriving in Europe from the East African region. They make up 9% of migrants to Europe. The main causes of migration from Somalia are understood to be spikes in insecurity and humanitarian need (driven by conflict and Al-Shabaab activity). There are also likely to be a significant number of 'economic migrants' looking for better economic opportunity than exists in Somalia. Large diaspora communities in the UK (thought to be 3-500,000) and elsewhere in Europe create a pull factor.
- We believe that **Sudan** is primarily a country of transit, though there are refugees fleeing conflict in Darfur. Numbers of economic migrants from Sudan are unknown - if someone claims to be from Darfur it is difficult to prove otherwise. The security services have periodic clamp-downs on Eritreans in Sudan (usually in Khartoum) with some forcible returns for not having the correct paperwork.

## General Asylum Statistics

- There were 25,771 asylum applications (main applicants) in the UK in the year ending June 2015. (Including dependants, there were 32,508).
- In recent quarters, we have seen fewer applications from some countries with traditionally higher refusal rates (Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nigeria), and more from countries with higher grant rates (Eritrea, Syria, Sudan).
- In the year ending June 2015, the highest numbers of applications came from Eritrean (3,568), Pakistani (2,302) and Syrian (2,204) nationals (main applicants only). Including dependants, the largest number of asylum applications came from Eritrea (3,624), Pakistan (3,276) and Iran (2,533).
- Compared to the year ending June 2014, the number of initial decisions on asylum applications (main applicants) increased by 107% in the year ending June 2015, to 28,538 from 13,795. (Including dependants, initial decisions increased by 117%, to 38,373 from 17,697).
- The total number of outstanding initial decisions has fallen in recent quarters (main applicants only – Q3 2014: 18,149, Q4 2014: 17,067; Q1 2015: 12,878, Q2 2015: 12,368; main applicants and dependants – Q3 2014: 24,369, Q4 2014: 22,898; Q1 2015: 16,879, Q2 2015: 16,163).
- We are certifying more cases, thus refusing clearly unfounded cases a right of appeal in the UK. In the year ending June 2015, 14% of all refusals for main applicants were certified, unchanged from the year ending June 2014. (Including dependants, 15% of refusals were certified, compared with 14% in the previous year).

## Support

- We currently support a total of over 36,000 asylum seekers (main applicants and dependants; sections 95, 98 & 4). At the end of June 2015, 30,457 asylum seekers and their dependants were being supported under Section 95.
- There are over 26,000 asylum seekers in dispersed accommodation, in over 200 local authorities. Our dispersal policy ensures a reasonable spread amongst those local authorities.

## UASCs

- There were 2,168 asylum applications from Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASCs) in the year ending June 2015, an increase of 46% from the year ending June 2014 (1,488). These applications represented 8% of all main applications for asylum.
- Despite the recent increase in UASC applications, they remain below the peak of 3,976 in 2008.

## Resettlement

- In the year ending June 2015, 166 Syrians were relocated to the UK under the VPR scheme (216 since the scheme began in March 2014). This is in addition to almost 5,000 Syrians (including dependants) who have been granted protection under our normal asylum rules since the crisis began in April 2011.

- In the year ending June 2015, we resettled 640 refugees under the Gateway Resettlement Programme. Since 2004, we have resettled 6,380 refugees under the programme and we met our target in the last financial year (April 2014 to March 2015), resettling over 750 refugees.

### Removals

- In the last two years (July 2013 to June 2015) there were over 8,500 enforced removals of people who had sought asylum at some stage (including dependants). In the same period there were over 5,500 voluntary departures of people who had sought asylum at some stage.

### International comparisons

- The number of asylum applications to the EU in the year ending June 2015 was the highest it has been since 2002.
- There were an estimated 754,700 asylum applications by main applicants and dependants to the 28 EU countries in the year ending June 2015 (an increase of 65% on the previous year). Of these, the UK received 32,600 (4% of EU asylum intake) compared to 259,300 in Germany, 92,600 in Hungary and 78,400 in Sweden. In 2010, the EU received 241,100 applications for main applicants and dependants, and of this the UK received 22,600 (9% of EU asylum intake).
- The UK had the seventh highest number of asylum applications within the EU in the year ending June 2015 (fifth in year ending June 2014). In the year ending June 2015, Germany, Hungary, Sweden, Italy, France and Austria received more asylum applications than the UK.
- Asylum claims in Germany were eight times those in the UK (259,300 vs 32,600) in the year ending June 2015. Hungary had the second highest number of applications in the year ending June 2015 after being ranked ninth during the previous 12 months.
- When the relative size of resident populations of the 28 EU countries is taken into account, the UK ranked 16th in terms of asylum seekers per head of the population in the year ending June 2015 (it was also 16th in the previous year).