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**SYRIAN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. This report provides an update on the Syrian Refugee re-settlement programme in Darlington.

**Summary**

2. Ten Syrian refugee families are to be re-settled into Darlington in the current year. The first arrivals were four families who arrived between May to August 2016 and the remaining families are expected in November 2016.
3. Whilst the Council has a long history of responding to the needs of various refugees and asylum seekers there were no active schemes in place so it was necessary to appoint a Syrian Refugee Officer on a 12 month secondment basis to provide specialist assistance .The scheme is fully funded from the Home Office.
4. The initial four families have settled and integrated well in the local community. All are accessing and utilising local services and progressing well with ESOL language classes.

**Recommendation**

5. It is recommended that :-
  - (a) The contents of the report are noted.
  - (b) Members provide comments and feedback on the contents of the report.

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Director Neighbourhood Services and Resources

**Background Papers**

There are no background papers

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S17 Crime and Disorder	It is not considered that this scheme will have any impact on crime and disorder based on previous refugee and asylum seeker projects.
Health and Well Being	All the medical needs of the refugees have been quickly identified and addressed
Carbon Impact	There are no carbon implications
Diversity	Supporting 10 families of Syrian origin
Wards Affected	Various
Groups Affected	BME Community
Budget and Policy Framework	The scheme is fully funded by the Home Office
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The report has no particular implications for the Sustainable Community Strategy
Efficiency	The service is cost neutral

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

#### Background

6. 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. The Government intends to expand the existing Syrian Vulnerable Person Scheme (VPS) and to resettle 20,000 Syrians in need of protection during this Parliament. The Syrian VPS is based on need and prioritises those who cannot be supported effectively in their region of origin. These include women and children at risk, people in severe need of medical care and survivors of torture and violence. The Government is continuing to work closely with the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), to identify cases that they deem in need of resettlement. The UK has been operating resettlement schemes for many years and has already established effective networks to accommodate and support resettled people. However, the Government 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 they 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.
  
7. Darlington Council has agreed to support 10 Syrian Refugee families, and this is happening on a phased basis up to November 2016. Individual family properties have been sourced from private landlords wherever possible but two low demand Council first floor flats have also been used. The household compositions of, both current and future refugees, varies between 1 and 6 individuals. Appropriate checks were carried out with the Police, Education and NHS for feasibility of selected properties based on locality to medical requirements, educational needs, school availability and safety within the locality. The identity of families is forwarded by the Home Office via a shared database with specified officers in Housing Services.

## Current Position

8. Whilst officers in Housing Services have overall responsibility for resettling these particular refugees they have worked with the Regional Migration Team and other local authorities to develop current best practice. Properties are fully furnished and decorated according to the statement of requirements issued by the Home Office. All rental charges are covered by Housing Benefit but individuals are expected to cover all domestic charges including water rates, council tax and general costing from their benefit allocation.
9. Support from the voluntary sector and other agencies have included:
  - (a) Darlington Action for Refugees (DAR) arranged soft furnishings and made food donations collected by local schools in Darlington. They also left welcome messages, flowers, toys and children's clothing in each property. DAR provided each family with a television and a licence for three months to assist with learning the English language. They have also arranged social events and introductions to other local Syrian families
  - (b) DWP provide a dedicated team who deliver essential information and benefit advice. Housing Services and the DWP have worked together to ensure that the delivery of benefits were effective, efficient and timely.
  - (c) All families were allocated a GP before arrival and all medical information was shared with surgeries in advance. Again Housing Services worked closely with GPs surgeries to ensure that medical needs were highlighted and dealt with accordingly. There are no major medical issues that have been identified that require any intensive involvement.
  - (d) Attempts to locate a dentist in Darlington have proven a difficult task due to waiting lists and general lack of spaces but eventually places were found within local practices in Darlington. This is a key issue as there is a need for dental work with most of the Refugee families. Going forward we will need to closely monitor this situation as other families arrive.
  - (e) Due to the initial families arriving at the end of term time they could not immediately join the local college for language classes so the Council's Learning & Skills Team arranged pre-ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) lessons twice weekly, Tuesday and Thursday between 12-2.00 pm. The needs of each family vary so there is a need to be flexible in terms of the support provided. Volunteers from DAR are also offering assistance in this area.
  - (f) All children have been registered with local schools which are all within walking distance of their home. All children have settled in well with minimum disruption and all have said they are enjoying their learning.

10. Lessons have been learnt, including not inundating families with too much information at one time. Families have interacted well within their locality, making acquaintances and friends. The teenagers have been socialising outside their immediate family circle and have joined various other groups and activities, particularly at the Dolphin Centre and Darlington Football Club. The families are keen to offer something back to Darlington, who they see as offering them a lifeline to a normal life and are enthusiastic to get into employment so they can self-support themselves and their families. Housing Services are looking at voluntary roles that may offer various routes into employment.