

## Cabinet

<b>Report Title:</b>	Syrian Resettlement Programme Casework Support
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	23 February 2016
<b>Lead Councillor(s):</b>	Councillor Colin Noble, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economic Development
<b>Local Councillor(s):</b>	All Councillors
<b>Director:</b>	Tessa Lindfield, Director of Public Health
<b>Assistant Director or Head of Service:</b>	Sara Blake, Head of Localities and Partnerships, Public Health
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### Brief summary of report

1. The Council is co-ordinating the agreement to bring up to 200 Syrian refugees to Suffolk under the Government Syrian Resettlement Programme (SRP). A requirement of the SRP is to provide casework support to the refugees. In order to put casework support in place in time to bring refugees to Suffolk in the Spring of 2016 it is proposed to direct contract Suffolk Refugee Support for year one, as they are the only locally based provider of support services for refugees. A tender process would then be run to select the casework support provider for years two to five

### What is Cabinet being asked to decide?

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. To give retrospective approval that Officers have entered into a direct contract for c£90,000 with Suffolk Refugee Support for one year to deliver the casework support element of the Syrian Resettlement Programme.</li> <li>3. To agree that a tender process should be run to select the casework support provider for years two to five of the programme.</li> </ol> |
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### Reason for recommendation

4. To comply with local and statutory procurement and commissioning requirements.

### What are the key issues to consider?

5. The Equality Impact Assessment, attached at Appendix 1, demonstrates that the implementation of this programme will have a positive impact on participants. Due to the small number of families arriving at any one time, there is not expected to be a negative impact on the wider community.

## **What are the resource and risk implications?**

6. The Syrian Resettlement Programme (SRP) is being run by the Home Office. Grant funding per individual is provided over a five year period on a tapering scale. Where social care or other support costs exceed the grant provided, an application can be made to the Home Office for additional funding above a minimum claim threshold of £1,000. While the profile of individuals is provided prior to their arrival, the actual costs of meeting their needs will not be known at the outset. Any support costs beyond year five will be borne locally. Suffolk Public Sector Leaders agreed that any additional costs of this programme not met by the Home Office would be shared.
7. Some grant funding is provided in advance for year 1 and then future claims are made in year. This will potentially give rise to a situation where costs will be incurred prior to receipt of funds from the Home Office, which has cash flow implications.
8. By awarding a direct contract to Suffolk Refugee Support to deliver the casework support in year one there could potentially be a risk of challenge from national providers. We are not aware of any examples elsewhere in the country of a challenge being made where a local authority has made a direct award to deliver this programme.

## **What are the timescales associated with this decision?**

9. In order to meet the timescales agreed with Suffolk Public Sector Leaders to be ready to accept Syrian refugees into Suffolk, casework support needs to be put in place forthwith. In order to achieve this, the Cabinet is asked to agree to direct contract Suffolk Refugee Support for year one, as they are the only locally based specialist provider of support services for refugees. A tender process would then be run to select the casework support provider for years two to five.

## **Alternative options**

10. The option to run a quick procurement for year one was not favoured as Suffolk Public Sector Leaders had requested that Suffolk respond quickly to make an offer to the Home Office to bring in Syrian refugees. In order to keep to this timescale, officers agreed to make the direct award for one year to Suffolk Refugee Support so that the casework support would be in place to be ready for arrivals from March 2016. On this basis alternative options are not viable.

## **Who will be affected by this decision?**

11. Syrian refugees and the providers of services to them.

## **Main body of report**

12. In response to the crisis in Syria, the Government are channelling aid into refugee camps in the area. In addition, in recognition that remaining in refugee camps does not meet the needs of some vulnerable people, the Government have also put in place plans to bring 20,000 refugees to the UK via the Syrian Resettlement Programme over the course of this Parliament.
13. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) is undertaking screening assessments in refugee camps to select individuals and families to participate in the scheme.

14. 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.
15. UNHCR assess Syrian families in refugee camps and refer cases to the Home Office who then check they meet the eligibility criteria and carry out security checks. Medical reports are also produced by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).
16. Those who are accepted under the SRP scheme will be granted humanitarian protection giving them leave to remain in the UK for 5 years.
17. The government have requested local authorities around the country to support this scheme and to house and support some refugees.
18. Suffolk Public Sector Leaders (SPSL) unanimously agreed to support the Syrian Resettlement Programme when they met on 16 October 2015 and agreed to take up to 200 Syrian refugees over 5 years via the resettlement programme.
19. SPSL requested that the Council co-ordinate the programme on their behalf. The Council have set up a task and finish group to collaborate on delivering the programme. Membership includes all of the district and borough councils, police, health, community and faith sector organisations.
20. The Home Office require that the casework support service provide advice and assistance with registering for mainstream benefits and services and signposting to other advice and information giving agencies. This includes: registering with local schools, English language and literacy classes; providing assistance with access to employment; support to access health services; orientation into the local area; support to integrate into the community; access to services in the local area; interpreters; and putting in place support plans for each family.
21. This casework support is very specialist. Currently, the only organisation based in Suffolk providing these types of services to refugees is the charity Suffolk Refugee Support (SRS). From the outset of the announcement by Central Government about plans to bring refugees to the UK, SRS expressed an interest in being part of any plans for Suffolk. SRS have been part of the task and finish group since its formation and have contributed to the ongoing discussions about delivery of casework support in Suffolk and expressed a wish to deliver the service.
22. There was an oversight on the part of officers involved in the process to not recognise that in managing the Home Office grant on behalf of SPSL that there was a need to follow Council Procurement Rules. This came to light only after SRS had started to put casework support arrangements in place and the Home Office had been notified that Suffolk were going to be able to accept Syrian refugees in the post-Christmas phase. Whilst the process could have been halted and a quick procurement undertaken for year one, this would have delayed the arrival of refugees by between 8 and 12 weeks.

23. SPSL requested that Suffolk respond quickly to the Government request for local authorities to take part in the programme. In order to meet this request there is insufficient time to undertake a full tender process from the outset, as would be required by the Council's Procurement Rules. Given the existing knowledge and expertise of SRS to deliver the casework service, the Cabinet is being made aware that officers have made a direct award to Suffolk Refugee Support for one year to deliver the casework support element of the Syrian Resettlement Programme. Cabinet approval must be given where any actions do not comply with the Procurement Rules. Due to the tight timeframe, this was not possible in advance of the decision. The Director of Resource Management gave his approval in advance of the award, and Cabinet are being asked to give their retrospective approval.
24. It is recognised that this could only be considered a short term solution to meet the immediate need for this service. Therefore, the Cabinet is asked to agree that a tender process should be run during the first year to select the casework support provider for years two to five of the programme.

**Sources of further information**

- a) No other documents have been relied on to a material extent in preparing this report