

Cheltenham Borough Council
Cabinet Member Decision
7 December 2015
Rehousing of Syrian Refugees

Accountable member	Cabinet Member Housing, Councillor Peter Jeffries
Accountable officer	Lead Commissioner Housing Services, Martin Stacy
Ward(s) affected	Any
Key/Significant Decision	No
Executive summary	<p>In the wake of the Syrian Refugee Crisis the Government has agreed rehouse up to 20,000 Syrian Refugees over the next 5 years.</p> <p>In order to support this initiative Cheltenham Borough Council has agreed to work with Gloucestershire County Council and other District Authorities in the county to rehouse a number of Syrian Refugees.</p> <p>In considering how many Syrian refugees Cheltenham Borough Council can assist, the authority has had regard to local needs and in particular any potential impact on homelessness that may come about as a result of accommodating refugees within our social housing stock. The authority has also taken into account the type of accommodation that becomes available and has ruled out using accommodation which is in greatest demand from local residents.</p> <p>Having consulted with Cheltenham Borough Homes' Housing Options and Lettings Teams, the authority has concluded that it can accommodate up to 15 Syrian Refugee families/year in 2 bedroom 4 person flats and up to a further 5 Syrian Refugee households/year in 1 bedroom sheltered accommodation, if required.</p> <p>The authority will however also look to the private rented market to assist in meeting this commitment. It will seek to do this via Chapter One, a Registered Provider that leases private rented accommodation from private landlords throughout the county.</p> <p>The authority will commit to this rehousing arrangement for the next 5 years, subject to reasonably incurred housing costs being met by the County Council.</p>
Recommendations	To authorise up to 15 x 2 bedroom family flats and up to 5 x 1 bedroom sheltered housing flats, all Cheltenham Borough Council owned, to be used each year over the next 5 years for the rehousing of Syrian refugees.

Financial implications	<p>All costs associated with rehousing Syrian refugees (i.e. medical, educational, support-related as well as the housing costs) will be paid by the Home Office to Gloucestershire County Council in the first instance. The Home Office have advised that the authority will be reimbursed for any void costs incurred (i.e. the period of time during which a property is empty and ready for re-letting) for a period of up to 2 months. Administrative costs can also be claimed along with any other reasonable housing costs incurred. It will be for Cheltenham Borough Council to calculate the costs incurred for rehousing individual families and to seek reimbursement for those costs from the County Council.</p> <p>See also risk register.</p> <p>Contact officer: Sarah Didcote, sarah.didcote@cheltenham.gov.uk, 01242</p>
Legal implications	<p>Legal agreements may have to be drawn up with the County Council to secure housing cost funding.</p> <p>As a local housing authority, the Council is limited in the type of tenancy it can offer to the applicants. Generally speaking, it is likely that the tenancies will be secure tenancies after the first year's occupation, if not before. The Council will have limited rights to obtain possession of the properties (especially after the first year), and the tenants will enjoy the usual benefits of being secure tenants.</p> <p>Contact officer: Rose Gemmell, rose.gemmell@tewkesbury.gov.uk, 01684 272014</p>
HR implications (including learning and organisational development)	<p>None as a direct consequence of this report</p> <p>Contact officer: Richard Hall, richard.hall@cheltenham.gov.uk, 01242</p>
Key risks	<p>As set out in Appendix 1.</p>
Corporate and community plan Implications	<p>This initiative, along with the wrap-around support and resettlement provision delivered by GARAS to help settle and integrate the Syrian Refugees into our communities, will support the authority's corporate outcome of creating stronger, safer and healthier communities.</p>
Environmental and climate change implications	<p>None as a direct consequence of this report.</p>
Property/Asset Implications	<p>None as a direct consequence of this report.</p> <p>Contact officer: David Roberts@cheltenham.gov.uk</p>

1. Background

- 1.1 In the wake of the Syrian Refugee Crisis the Government has agreed rehouse up to 20,000 Syrian Refugees over the next 5 years.
- 1.2 In order to support this initiative Cheltenham Borough Council has agreed to work with Gloucestershire County Council and other District Authorities in the county to rehouse a number of Syrian Refugees.
- 1.3 Gloucestershire County Council is the lead authority for the coordination of efforts to resettle and integrate Syrian refugees into the county. The County Council will have responsibility for ensuring that the support, health and educational needs of these Syrian refugees are met and that refugees are fully settled and integrated members of our community.
- 1.4 As part of Cheltenham Borough Council's offer and commitment to assist in this refugee crisis, the authority is willing to commit the use of its own housing stock of up to 15 x 2 bedroom flats and up to 5 x 1 bedroom sheltered flats per year over 5 years to house Syrian refugees. Wrap-around support will then be provided to these families from services commissioned by the County Council.
- 1.5 Flats will be considered for their potential suitability as soon as they become vacant, and if suitable they will not be advertised through Gloucestershire Homeseeker. Instead the properties will be direct matched to Syrian refugees in need as part of a multi-agency rehousing arrangement, as is permissible within Gloucestershire Homeseeker's Allocations Policy.

2. Reasons for recommendations

- 2.1 This authority is very keen to assist in alleviating the Syrian refugee crisis. The authority is also keen to balance its appetite to assist refugees with other potentially competing priorities of meeting local housing need and preventing homelessness in Cheltenham.
- 2.2 The authority has therefore worked closely with Cheltenham Borough Homes' Housing Options Team and its Lettings Team to understand the frequency of turnover of our council housing stock, the levels of demand and the potential impact on homelessness.
- 2.3 Whilst the use of any of the council's housing stock will obviously have an impact on meeting local housing need, our priority is to keep this impact to a minimum and to ensure that there is a negligible impact on homelessness within the town.
- 2.4 With this in mind, the Authority has ruled out the possibility of using any houses or maisonettes or any large (i.e. 3 bedroom) flats within its own housing stock. In addition, the use of 1 bedroom general needs flats have also been ruled out because of the levels of demand from single people and couples.
- 2.5 Given the relatively high turnover of 2 bedroom flats within our housing stock (on average approximately 50 x 2 bedroom flats become available across the town each year) we are confident that using a proportion of these flats for Syrian refugees will have the least impact on local housing need and that there is unlikely to be an impact on homelessness, provided Syrian refugees are accommodated in relatively small numbers throughout the year.
- 2.6 The Authority will therefore be accommodating only 2 Syrian Refugee families in the first phase of rehousing and settlement within the town, which is expected to take place before Christmas 2015.

3. Alternative options considered

- 3.1 The Authority has considered the use of the private rented sector to assist in the rehousing of Syrian refugees. This has not been ruled out, but the accommodation needs to be well managed given the vulnerability of these refugees.

- 3.2** Chapter One is a Registered Provider that offers a private leasing scheme to landlords in the private rented sector. We are keen for Chapter One to support the authority in helping to meet our commitment to house Syrian refugees in Cheltenham. However market conditions are such that whilst Chapter One has had some notable success in acquiring private rented accommodation in Gloucester and in other areas of the county, they have been relatively less successful in leasing accommodation in Cheltenham. It is therefore reasonable to expect relatively limited assistance from Chapter One in Cheltenham.
- 3.3** The Authority has also contacted all Registered Providers with accommodation in the area, and a number of Registered Providers are open to providing assistance. The turnover of other RP accommodation is however less predictable and often more popular (because family accommodation are more often houses than flats) so again the use of this option whilst not ruled out may be limited.
- 3.4** Any accommodation that is accessed via Chapter One or any other Registered Provider to assist the Syrian refugees will contribute to the sum total of assistance that this authority is willing to offer.

4. Consultation and feedback

- 4.1** There has been extensive consultation with Cheltenham Borough Homes who share the authority's view that the number of Syrian refugees the authority is committed to assist each year will be manageable and is unlikely to have a detrimental impact on homelessness within the town. The type of dwellings we have chosen to use for these Syrian refugees is also supported.
- 4.2** Cheltenham's Positive Participation Partnership, a partnership made up of representatives of the voluntary and statutory sector within the town were also informed of our intentions to assist a manageable number of Syrian Refugees in the way of rehousing, and this support was welcomed by the Partnership.

5. Performance management –monitoring and review

- 5.1** Gloucestershire County Council is the lead authority in the coordination of efforts to settle and integrate Syrian refugees into local communities across the county. Both Cheltenham Borough Council and Cheltenham Borough Homes will play an important role in the planning stages and in the rehousing of Syrian refugees, as well as informing discussions and in feeding back to the County Council experiences on the ground.

Report author	Contact officer: Martin Stacy, Lead Commissioner – Housing Services Email: martin.stacy@cheltenham.gov.uk, Tel: 01242 775214
Appendices	1. Risk Assessment
Background information	None

The risk				Original risk score (impact x likelihood)			Managing risk				
Risk ref.	Risk description	Risk Owner	Date raised	Impact 1-5	Likelihood 1-6	Score	Control	Action	Deadline	Responsible officer	Transferred to risk register
	If Syrian refugees are accommodated in social housing this may prevent homelessness families from being housed, resulting in increased homelessness.	Martin Stacy	25.11.15	1	2	2	Reduce	<p>CBH's Housing Options and Lettings Teams have been consulted and they have informed the decision on overall numbers of refugees Cheltenham can support and on the type of accommodation that should be offered in order to minimise any adverse impact on local needs.</p> <p>The council will continue to explore the possibility of housing at least some of the Syrian refugees in the private rented sector via Chapter One, notwithstanding the challenges in achieving this because of market conditions.</p>	Ongoing for the period of the initiative (5 years)	Martin Stacy	
	If Syrian families are not supported into resettling and integrating into local communities this could lead to social isolation and a potential increase in social tensions	Martin Stacy	25.11.15	2	4	12	Reduce	Gloucestershire County council are to receive funding from the Home Office to enable the commissioning of support and reintegration services	15.12.15	Martin Stacy	

								<p>for Syrian Refugees. GARAS is a provider within Gloucestershire which has the specialist skills to provide such a service.</p> <p>CBH will also put in place arrangements to ensure that Syrian refugees are welcomed into communities and feel part of the local community from day one.</p> <p>The council's community engagement team will also ensure that refugees are able to engage in local community activities.</p>			
	<p>If funding provided by the home office to the County Council is insufficient to meet the social care, health and support costs, Cheltenham Borough Council's housing costs may not be met in full.</p>	Martin Stacy	25.11.15	1	3	3	Reduce	<p>The home office has advised that if funding exceeds the allocated 'tariff' for each household, the county council can make an application for further funding, and this will be supported by the home office provided costs are reasonable.</p> <p>CBC will explore what legal agreement it may need to enter into with</p>	15.12.15	Martin Stacy	

								<p>the County Council to ensure that any reasonably incurred housing costs are met.</p> <p>CBC may choose to stop assisting in the support of Syrian refugees if reasonable housing costs are not met.</p>			
	<p>If Syrian families are placed in social housing tenancies, this could result in resentment and retaliation from some individuals</p>	<p>Martin Stacy</p>	<p>25.11.15</p>	<p>3</p>	<p>3</p>	<p>9</p>	<p>Reduce</p>	<p>The number of Syrian families to be assisted is moderate to take account of our other priorities of meeting local housing need.</p> <p>We will work with Chapter One to identify alternative sources of accommodation in the private rented sector, where possible.</p> <p>Any threats to Syrian Refugees will be dealt with robustly by CBH's Safer Estates Team and/or the Police</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Martin Stacy</p>	
<p>Explanatory notes</p> <p>Impact – an assessment of the impact if the risk occurs on a scale of 1-5 (1 being least impact and 5 being major or critical)</p>											

Likelihood – how likely is it that the risk will occur on a scale of 1-6

(1 being almost impossible, 2 is very low, 3 is low, 4 significant, 5 high and 6 a very high probability)

Control - Either: Reduce / Accept / Transfer to 3rd party / Close