

Title:	Refugees & Asylum Seekers Contingency Planning and Support
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Purpose/Key Messages:	To discuss with BHC partners preparation and contingency plans following government announcements on the refugee crisis
Significance to BHC and Delivering SCS outcomes:	The is currently a major issue and is significant to all members of the BHC
What is BHC being asked to do?	To consider what contingency planning and support partners can provide were a significant refugee scenario to unfold
Next steps and report back mechanism:	BHC will receive updates and further reports as necessary

1. Summary and Policy Context:

- 1.1. The latest estimate from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is that almost half the population of Syria has been forced to flee their homes. Half of these people are children. UNHCR has launched an appeal to governments to offer 960,000 resettlement places for Syrian refugees. However so far only 80,000 places have been offered, most by the US government.
- 1.2. In January 2014 the Home Secretary made a statement to Parliament outlining the UK government's intention to resettle some of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees. This Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) Scheme prioritises three categories of person:
 - Survivors of torture and violence
 - Women and children at risk
 - Those in need of medical care

This scheme was fully funded for one year.

- 1.3 Until now, this has been a small scheme with only 2-3 households arriving per month. In total there were to be only a few hundred beneficiaries nationally. 219 people have arrived on the programme so far this year (Sept 15)
- 1.4 BHCC was approached by a number of groups and members of the public (including the local 'City of Sanctuary' group) who asked us to participate in the scheme and offered to work in partnership with the council on it. The Council and statutory partners agreed to do this.
- 1.5 Until now, those who are accepted under the VPR Scheme elsewhere in the UK have been granted humanitarian protection giving them leave to remain for 5 years with full access to employment and public funds and rights to family reunion comparable to refugees. **At the end of the 5 years, if they have not been able to return to Syria, they may be eligible to apply for permanent settlement in the UK.** Settlement may be refused if the person is convicted of a criminal offence during their leave and will be refused if they pose a danger to the public, or to national security.

2. Recommendations accepted by CMB:

- 2.1 That CMB note that the financial package offered by the Home Office is considered broadly sufficient to support Syrian refugees for the first year of their arrival, and that local public services would be able to manage the ongoing needs of a small number (5-10 households) of Syrians as they would be entitled to take up employment and/or to claim welfare benefits like anyone else. That CMB also note that more detailed negotiations about the Home Office financial package would take place when details of the household composition and needs of prospective beneficiaries were made available.
- 2.2 However, CMB should note that the lack of affordable accommodation in the city creates a serious barrier to our participation in the programme.
- 2.3 That CMB note the national and local community support for our participation in the scheme including the potential of a community campaign to seek our participation (which may lead to a motion to full council) as well as the offer to work in partnership to find affordable housing for Syrian refugees within the private sector.
- 2.4 That CMB therefore agrees in principle to our participation in the scheme if suitable accommodation, sustainable for at least three years, can be found in the private rented sector, and that the statutory sector supports – as appropriate – community led efforts to find such housing. This would include advice regarding the suitability and safety of accommodation for long term family accommodation, bearing in mind that these BME households would be particularly vulnerable, including to the risk of racial harassment.

3. Update 7th September 2015

- 3.1 No refugees have arrived in the city yet on the Syrian VPR scheme. However it is worth noting that the city continues to receive – as it has done for decades – small numbers of asylum seekers who live within our BME communities. Some of these people are from Syria.
- 3.2 Following the agreement for Brighton & Hove to participate in the scheme, low key enquiries have been made to find local landlords willing to participate in the scheme (with limited success) but we did not 'go public' with our call for landlords until last Friday 4th September.
- 3.3 A service model for how we would provide support to the refugees on arrival is being worked up by community safety at the moment – with the CCG and colleagues in the voluntary sector. Support will be provided through existing services in the statutory and voluntary sector who have much experience of working with Arabic speaking refugees, This service model will need to adapt to take account of the government announcement (below) and the huge groundswell of support from the local population, churches etc.
- 3.4 On 7th September 2015 the government is announcing a substantial expansion of this scheme and – possibly – a new funding package and reception arrangements.