

Syrian Refugees

Purpose

As background to the discussion.

Summary

The Minister with responsibility for Syrian refugees, Richard Harrington, will set out what the Government is doing to deliver the Prime Minister's commitment to resettle up to 20,000 Syrian refugees in the UK over the next 5 years. This session gives an opportunity for councillors to raise questions or issues which particularly affect local government, so that the Minister can take them into account as the scheme develops. A biography of the speaker is attached at **Appendix A**.

Recommendation

Members are invited to note the presentation and raise issues from a local government perspective.

Action

Officers will take forward actions identified.

Contact officer:

Emma Jenkins / Sally Burlington

Position:

Senior Adviser / Head of Policy

Phone no:

0207 664 3046 / 020 7664 3099

Email:

Emma.Jenkins@local.gov.uk / Sally.Burlington@local.gov.uk

Syrian Refugees

Background

1. In his statement to the House of Commons on Monday 7 September, the Prime Minister announced that Britain should resettle up to 20,000 Syrian refugees over the rest of the Parliament. These refugees will be taken from the camps in the countries neighbouring Syria, having been referred by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). At the same time the government announced the Home Office and Department for Communities and Local Government would work with local authorities and the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales to agree details of the arrangements to house and support the refugees.
2. Rather than create new arrangements for resettling Syrian refugees, the government has decided to expand the criteria for the existing Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) scheme. The humanitarian criteria will be broadened to include other vulnerable categories previously excluded, but it still will continue to focus on the most vulnerable. The expanded scheme will include those already placed and to be placed under the existing scheme. Refugees will be granted a five year humanitarian protection visa.
3. The aim of the scheme is to place vulnerable people as quickly as possible in the areas that can best meet their needs. The government is working with the LGA, local authorities, UNHCR and others to simplify and quicken the means by which families and individuals are processed through the current scheme and to minimise any impacts on existing communities. The Home Office has indicated that it will seek to ensure an equitable distribution of refugees across the country so that no individual local authority bears a disproportionate share of the burden.

The LGA's Work

4. Through the Asylum, Migration and Refugee Task Group, the LGA has been involved in discussions with the government and with regions since September to find sustainable resettlement solutions that minimise the pressures on local authorities, local communities and vulnerable individuals.
5. The LGA groups have nominated four lead members to act as a working group to support the Asylum, Refugee and Migration Task Force. Negotiations on the Syrian refugees scheme with government are going well and we have secured a commitment that additional funding will be available beyond the first year after a refugee's arrival.
6. We are now working with Government to establish how that funding will work in more detail, and how the scheme will be managed and co-ordinated. We expect those discussions to run through the Spending Review and for further details to be announced at the latest by the Local Government Settlement in December. Councils who wish to participate in the current scheme can come forward now to offer support to the Home Office, and will also benefit from the extended funding.
7. The LGA website is regularly updated with further information as it emerges and gives contacts in the Regional Strategic Migration Partnerships who can provide further information and advice. You can access the refugees webpage at <http://www.local.gov.uk/refugees>

Appendix A

Richard Harrington MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister with responsibility for Syrian refugees)



Richard Harrington was appointed Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Home Office (Jointly with Department for Communities and Local Government and Department for International Development) in September 2015. He is the Minister with special responsibility for Syrian refugees. In this role, he is responsible for coordinating and delivering work across government to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees in the UK, along with coordinating the provision of government support to Syrian refugees in the region.

He was elected as the Conservative MP for Watford in 2010. During his time in Parliament he has served as a member of the International Development Select Committee, General Secretary of the All Party Kashmir Group and Vice Chairman of the All Party Film Group.

Before being elected to Parliament, Richard worked as fundraising director for the Variety Club Children's Charity from 2000 - 2010. Prior to this, he ran a property development company that he started with two friends, which at its peak employed 2000 people. He attended Leeds Grammar school and went on to study law at Oxford University.

Besides his work on Syrian refugees, Richard's main political interests are youth unemployment, local transport infrastructure, business and enterprise, and apprenticeships. Outside of politics, he is a Patron of the Peace Hospice, an honorary Watford Rotarian, and a supporter of Watford and Chelsea FC.