

Councillors Briefing Note No. 314

Service: Corporate
Further Enquiries to: Carolyn Godfrey
Date Prepared: 07/12/2016
Direct Line: 01225 713751

Update on Syrian refugees in Wiltshire – One Year On

It is now a year since full council passed a motion to participate in the Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme and the first Syrian refugees arrived in Wiltshire. Wiltshire was one of the first local authorities to welcome refugees under the scheme and is now home to 68 Syrian refugees.

Wiltshire Council is continuing to work closely with public sector partners and the community to ensure homes, school places and all necessary support is in place for when refugees arrive in the county. The Refugee Programme Board continues to coordinate support for arrivals from the NHS, Wiltshire Police and DWP and other partners (such as Wiltshire College for English lessons) as well as council services for education, housing, skills and social care.

We are grateful to the many volunteers who have worked with us and our partner agencies to ensure they have everything they need to settle here quickly. The volunteers have been part of a multi-agency approach to ensure the individuals and families have all they need. Our families are based all over Wiltshire with each family or person having a volunteer on hand to support them as they become accustomed to the British way of life. Our families who have been here for some time are already integrating with their communities and volunteering or gaining work experience as well as preparing to find work.

Some of the Syrian refugees in the county have recently been reunited with other members of their family. We have worked closely with the Home Office to achieve this and where we can we consider such requests. Each of the families that have been reunited with relatives in Wiltshire has been eligible in their own right for the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation scheme (that is, they fall into the most vulnerable category of refugees who have been victims of violence or torture, have medical needs or are women and girls at risk).

The numbers of Syrian refugees we can accommodate in 2017 will be determined to a large extent by the availability of suitable accommodation. If you know of someone willing to explore renting their house or flat to a Syrian refugee, please contact the housing options team on [01225 718005](tel:01225718005) or homeless@wiltshire.gov.uk

We are looking for self contained properties, with their own entrance, that are available to rent for a minimum of 12 months at Local Housing Allowance rate. The team are happy to talk about wider support that can be given to enable properties to be rented. The properties will be for families or individuals living on their own. We work with Wiltshire Community Foundation and volunteers who can help with cleaning and overseeing the properties, including furnishing and decorating properties and providing welcome packs.

Support is in place for each family, including interpreters and an appointed support worker to help the families settle in and become integrated. We also check capacity at local GP surgeries and schools to ensure they are able to meet local needs. All refugees are able to work in the UK and are supported to learn English (when not already fluent). Many already have a professional background or qualification and those who have arrived in Wiltshire already have shown a strong desire to integrate and have been incredibly grateful for the opportunity for a safe new home.

Funding for the refugee programme comes through the UK Government's International Aid budget and this covers all the costs - including furnishing the homes and ensuring refugees have the key essentials to help them start their life here.

Know someone who wants to help?

Wiltshire is one of nine pilot areas where people can log online to offer help to support refugee families who have settled in the county. The Help Refugees in the UK webpage has been launched by the government to allow people interested in providing support to log their interest and detail the support they can provide. In the Wiltshire Council area, people wishing to help can offer in a number of areas including housing; community, group and cultural activities; electrical goods and toys; full or part time jobs; or fostering and independent visiting.

People willing to help can access the website on <https://help-refugees-uk.service.gov.uk/next> to register the services they can offer. Wiltshire Council will then wherever possible match these offers to those who can benefit.