

ISLINGTON SYRIAN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT VCS RESPONSE MEETING

14th October 2015

1. An outline of the work that Islington Councillors have been undertaking at a national and local level, provided by Councillor Asima Shaikh

- The UK government has committed to resettling 20,000 Syrian refugees over the next five years
- As a Council, Islington has pledged to take refugees with the financial support of central government
- The Council is currently waiting for an announcement from central government which will detail the number of refugees who will resettle in Islington and the needs that they have.
- As a Council we continue to lobby central government for more support
- We should think about – what NGOs can offer asylum seekers?
- Impact from voluntary community sector is very necessary; as a one community you can lobby council in order to draw their attention to refugee problem

2. National Context – Information on the Government Refugee Resettlement Programme and what it will mean for Islington, provided by Kim Ward, Islington Council

- The Programme is targeted at people living in refugee camps. It is focussed on helping those in greatest need and prioritises people requiring urgent medical treatment, survivors of torture and violence, and women and children at risk
- Refugees arriving through the scheme will be granted a five year humanitarian protection visa
- Any details about numbers of refugees who will resettle in Islington and date
- The biggest cost and needs is housing/accommodation but in addition other support is required

3. Islington Council Response – An overview on the work being undertaken by different Council departments and Islington's Task Team, provided by John Muir, Islington Council

- The Council has written to the Greater London Authority expressing our willingness to accept refugees through the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Register. We are now awaiting guidance from the Home Office as to how the scheme to resettle refugees in local authority areas will work; it is expected that we will receive details on funding arrangements from in November.
- The Council recognises that people arriving through the Syrian VPR are likely to have complex needs and vulnerabilities, and that the numbers are anticipated to be low. Assessment will be undertaken in refugee camps and it is understood that local

authorities will be given details in advance of arrivals so that we can prepare and respond.

- In regards to accommodation, the Council is looking for self-contained properties from private landlords that are below [LHA rates](#). As with all private sector accommodation, the Council's Housing Team will need to come round to look at the properties. If there are concerns about holding properties without rent, the Council may be able to come to an arrangement with landlords to mitigate the void.
- The Council wants to get to a position where we can provide a clear overview of VCS organisations that can support arrivals and communicate this on the Council's webpages.
- To provide internal clarity and potential points of contact for VCS organisations, the Council has established a Director-led working group with representatives from across the Council including:
 - The NRPF team – providing guidance on Govt policy and implementation
 - Housing – procurement and assessment of private sector housing options
 - Children's Safeguarding and Foster Care Team – to identify fostering opportunities for unaccompanied minors
 - Adult social services – identified lead to support access to health and social care
 - The Voluntary and Community Sector Development Team to support the VCS and faith groups to establish and coordinate a response and identify links between the work of relevant Council departments
 - Communications and media – to ensure clarity of responsibilities

4. Arrival needs – discussion on the needs that people arriving may have – VCS Response

- Accommodation/housing
- Food
- Occupation
- Self of belonging to community
- Social pack
- Rehabilitation (because of nightmarish experience) in order to get back to normal life
- Social life because they don't speak English, some steps to simplify their communication
- Link with their communities because council couldn't give enough support
- National services are complicated, lots of applications are broken down because of mistakes caused by language problems
- Translation barriers
- Mental problems
- Traumas
- Safe place for people who will come and also for people who are living in Islington to avoid some discrimination
- Currently not enough funds for ESOL
- Culturally appropriate foster care

- Needs of arrivals will vary depending on a variety of factors

5. The VCS Response - what each organisation can offer?

- Contact to voluntary community sector
- Idea of preparing welcome pack
- Social services
 - I. Housing, food, clothes
 - II. Language/ESOL
 - III. Employment/work/occupation
 - IV. Guidance on local services/mentoring
 - V. Genuine welcome (links to local community, social life, sense of belonging)
 - VI. Specialist therapy/counselling
 - VII. Family tracing/reunion

Feedback from group sessions:

The group divided into four breakout sessions focussing on 'Guidance on Local Services', 'Establishing a welcome', 'ESOL & Language' and 'Counselling and Therapy Services'. Each group discussed the skills/expertise and capacity that the organisations in the discussion could offer, opportunities for collaboration and how these agendas might be advanced.

At the end of the discussion time, each group provided feedback.

Guidance on Local Services

The group discussing guidance on local services highlighted a need to provide information on local services of relevance to people arriving into the borough in a suitable format (medium and language). It was proposed that this guidance should be tailored to the needs of people arriving and should be a tangible product. The group highlighted the need to map the language skills that are available in different organisations. The idea of a meet and greet welcoming event was also posited by the group. Going forward it was felt that direct representation from schools be sought as schools play a vital part of integration. Additionally, it was suggested that it would be useful to have information on that free activities that are taking place in the community and that VCS groups could promote opportunities better.

Establishing a welcome

The group highlighted an opportunity to support people arriving into the borough to know about the range of groups that exist in the borough and the importance of sign-posting between different VCS and faith groups. The group suggested that there should be a message of welcome from the Council and highlighted opportunities for celebration and exchange in cultural activities.

ESOL/Language

The group discussed the need for ESOL and language support in particular for those newly arriving into the borough. The group explained the needs for more financial support for ESOL providers, as the lack of funding led to a closure of their services. The group suggested having a directory of the VCS organisations in Islington so they can signpost and match services in regard to language and ESOL support. This group suggested that there was a need to establish mechanism for identifying and matching language expertise.

Counselling and Therapy Services

This group highlighted the extent of provision in place and willingness to work with people arriving. The group highlighted an absence of an organisation focussed on Children and adolescents in the discussion group and suggested this would need to be identified. The children's therapist at Baobab – Sheila Melzac was recommended as a potential contact.

The group observed that there are less and less organisations in the borough of Islington that can provide casework support around these issues (due to cuts in funding and legal aid). As a result therapists are doing a lot of the work themselves but lack the time/resources to do this properly. Nafsiyat and Women's Therapy Centre are already closed six months into the year as funding from Islington is not enough. Camden & Haringey have much bigger contracts.

Camden is taking a different approach to the refugee resettlement issue. They're setting up a hub for when the Syrian refugees arrive. This hub will assess all of their needs, including mental health, and the refugee will be referred to all relevant services in one go. The organisations in this group were having meetings with commissioners and they will be fully funded by Camden for their work.

List of VSC Organisations in attendance

| First name | Surname | Organisation | Email |
|-------------------|----------------|--|--|
| Alganesh | Messele | Academic | alganesh09@hotmail.co.uk |
| Andrew | ? | Highbury Baptist Church | andrew@highburybaptistchurch.org |
| Bahar | Nassiri | British Refugee Council | bahar.nassiri@RefugeeCouncil.org.uk |
| Eleanor | Tomlinson | Health Advocacy Project Manor Gardens Centre | Eleanor@manorgardenscentre.org |
| Gulderen | Koyel | Turkish and Kurdish Supplementary School | gkoyel@hotmail.com |
| Karen | Stallard | Union Chapel | minister@unionchapel.org.uk |
| Kim | Ehnholt | Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust | Kim.Ehnholt@candi.nhs.uk |
| Mohammed | Kozbar | Chairman Finsbury Park Mosque | mkozbar@hotmail.co.uk |
| Nazira | Mehmari | IKWRO | Nazira.Mehmari@ikwro.org.uk |
| Rabbi Mendy | Korer | Jewish Islington | Rabbi@JewishIslington.co.uk |
| Robin | Ewart-Biggs | London & South East Clinical Services Manager | rewartbiggs@freedomfromtorture.org |
| Sawsan | Salim | KMEWO | sawsansalim@yahoo.com |
| Sule | Ibrahim | Turkish Cypriot Community Association | sule@tcca.org |