

## Leader's Statement to Full Council – 23 September 2015

### Migrant update

Members will be aware that 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 using the established UNHCR (UN High Commissioner for Refugees) process for identifying and resettling refugees. The Prime Minister has also announced that the criteria for the existing Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation scheme will be expanded, and a new Minister for Syrian refugees – Richard Harrington MP.

You may also have heard the Home Secretary's [statement](#) to the Commons on 16 September. In it she made clear that the Government recognises the long-term nature of resettling Syrian refugees in communities. Whilst the cost of supporting the refugees in their first year in Britain will be funded from foreign aid spending, the local government community, through the Local Government Association, continues to press them on a firm commitment that funding to councils needs to reflect this. This is important to ensure vulnerable children, families and adults have access to the public services they will need, and are not seen as a burden by the communities who will be welcoming them.

On this basis it was positive to hear the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Greg Clark MP, [in his evidence](#) to the Communities and Local Government Committee, recognise that quantifying funding after the first year of settlement is an important area where local authorities can contribute its expertise.

The LGA has undertaken to coordinate offers from councils via the Regional Strategic Migration Partnership (RSMP). Although no details are yet available around who the arrivals will be, the LGA is aiming to get a sense of numbers of the adults, children or families each council may be able to take given local circumstances.

This Council, like councils across the country, has received a number of generous offers of support from residents. The Home Office has clarified that, at this point, there is no expectation that the Syrian scheme will require members of the public to offer rooms in their houses. In the meantime, residents making other offers of help can be directed to the [Government's response website](#) or the Red Cross for further information. We will also direct those offering support to children and young people to the County Council's fostering team.

In addition, those individuals wanting to help refugees as soon as they arrive in the UK by volunteering or providing donations of items or money should contact relevant local and national charities.

The LGA has created a very useful '[one-stop shop](#)' of advice and resources, to answer some of the questions members may have about councils taking in Syrian refugees – this can be accessed at <http://www.local.gov.uk/refugees>

## **Police reform**

Kent Police are working on their plans to refine their Local Policing Model, which are designed to manage the financial challenges Kent Police, along with all forces in the UK, are facing over the next three to four years.

This includes looking at how to update their divisional structure, and also looking at their estate and patrol bases. We have been assured that they aim to ensure continuity, and therefore that the principle of local policing will remain at the heart of the model. Swale is already in a paired sub-division, but going forwards we are likely to be paired with Canterbury instead of Maidstone as Swale-Canterbury makes more sense in terms of transportation and policing demand, as does aligning Maidstone with Ashford.

We also understand that each district will be led by an Inspector, recognising the reality of 24/7 operational command at that level. And we are assured that no changes in relation to CSU staffing will be proposed.

In terms of timescales, go-live is planned for February 2016.

In a further development, a specialist team has been created to investigate Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). With the support of the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office, 14 new posts have been established to work alongside a range of agencies in identifying and responding to children vulnerable to exploitation, by combining intelligence-led policing, investigation, safeguarding, and partnership working.

The team will be co-located with agencies and involve new Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation Boards that, along with key stakeholders, set up safe operating practices and share information. The team includes analysts and intelligence officers to develop a true understanding of the prevalence of CSE in Kent, and support local resources to disrupt and deter any emerging threats, investigate concerns, and prosecute offenders wherever they are identified.

I know that members will want to hear more about these changes in the way in which the police will be working, so I have asked officers to arrange an evening briefing for members before the planned go-live date in February 2016.

## **Medway NHS Foundation Trust update**

As you will be aware from the media coverage, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) carried out an inspection of Medway NHS Foundation Trust at the end of August, as a result of which concerns were again raised about the performance of the Trust's A&E Department.

To help them address the issues raised, the Trust and its South East healthcare partners put in place an ambulance divert at Medway Maritime Hospital for Wednesday and Thursday of last week, and the welcome use of the Sheppey Hospital, to help alleviate pressures in the A&E Department, allowing the Trust a period of time to review existing processes and procedures in the Department. Work with the Trust partners is ongoing to ensure further measures are put in place to

support staff at the hospital, including additional training for clinical staff in the A&E Department.

NHS England, clinical commissioning groups, and health providers are working together to identify a longer term solution. Members and senior officers at Swale are meeting with the new Chief Executive of the Trust to press for the appropriate remedial measures to be put in place as a matter of urgency, including the long term potential of the Sheppey Hospital, which we all agree is a much needed local resource.

### **Local Plan update**

Following the Council's submission of the emerging Local Plan in April 2015, the Local Plan Inspector raised concerns about the housing target set within the Plan, and requested that the Council undertake a review of key evidence base, including an up-to-date review of objectively assessed housing need. As Members will be aware, the Council had argued that, based on experience of historic rates of market delivery, strategic infrastructure issues, and challenging viability and deliverability conditions, the Council were only in a position to meet a housing target of 540 dwellings per annum

At the Local Plan Inspector's suggestion, officers have been working hard to compile new evidence to update the housing need figure, as per new CLG planning guidance. This will enable us to enter into constructive discussion in order to give the Inspector confidence that we have a realistic approach to objectively assessed need. This has been reappraised to 776 dwellings per annum (slightly up from the 740 dwellings per annum at February 2013).

The other stream of work in hand is to reappraise sites submitted to our land availability assessment, but not allocated to date. This is to demonstrate to the Inspector that there is also a range of potentially deliverable sites to meet the assessed need should she be minded to direct the Council to adopt a higher target than in the submitted Plan. This in turn maximises our chance of being offered the opportunity to modify the Plan to render it sound, whilst keeping the to the development strategy and principles set out in the submitted version of the Plan.

Following the first round of EIP hearings this autumn, we anticipate that if the Inspector is satisfied that a higher housing target is both justified and achievable in principle, she will prepare an interim statement setting out what the overall housing target should be, and that we should seek to make additional housing allocations to meet that through modifications to the Plan. The Council would then need to agree such modifications; and undertake public consultation early in the new year on its preferred additional sites to meet the new target.

If we follow this route it is likely that the Examination in Public would then need to be reconvened in Summer 2016 to consider the modifications proposed, and the results of the consultation. We will of course keep Members apprised of progress of the Examination in Public through November and December.

**Cllr Andrew Bowles**  
**Council Leader**