



HM Government

Community Sponsorship Guidance for Local Authorities



Contents

Local Authorities and Community Sponsorship	3
Refugee Resettlement: An overview	3
Community Sponsorship: A complementary approach	5
10 Steps to Community Sponsorship	6
Local Authority Involvement: Where do you come in?	10
The Sponsor Arrangement: The first two years.....	12
Sponsorship Breakdown	14
What Next?	15

Local Authorities and Community Sponsorship

Community sponsorship enables local community groups to welcome and support refugees directly in their local communities. It was introduced by the Home Office in response to the desire from civil society to play a greater role in refugee resettlement, and with the expectation that the community-led approach will lead to positive integration outcomes for refugees and communities. Establishing positive engagement and collaborative working relationships with local authorities is essential for community groups. This guide for local authorities sets out their role in the community sponsorship process.

“Oxford City Council wants to support Community Sponsorship groups and have been very pleased to have worked closely with the Home Office and a Community Sponsorship group who have been approved and are getting ready to welcome their first family. Community sponsorship groups can bring a range of skills and community opportunities for the refugee family they are supporting. They also provide a great way for the family to make links in their community from day one which can help them settle in quickly and integrate into life in the UK.”

Naomi Winnifrith, Oxford City Council

Refugee Resettlement

An overview

In the last decade, conflicts across the Middle East and North African (MENA) region have left millions in need of protection. The UK, in the shape of local authorities, with the support of community groups and the voluntary sector, has played a vital role in helping those arriving here to feel welcome and able to adjust to a new life in the UK.

The UK has been supporting some of the most vulnerable refugees for many years through the Gateway Protection and Mandate resettlement programmes. In 2014 and in response to the conflict in Syria, the UK launched the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). This was expanded in September 2015 with a pledge by the government to resettle 20,000 individuals by 2020. In 2017, the scheme was opened up to all nationalities affected by the Syrian conflict. The Vulnerable Children’s Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) commenced in 2016, with a view to resettling up to 3,000 individuals. VCRS is open to all children deemed to be “at risk”, and their families, within the MENA region.

UNHCR Vulnerability Criteria

At least one member of each resettled household will have met one or more of the following UNHCR criteria:

Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS)	Vulnerable Children Resettlement Scheme (VCRS)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• survivors of violence or torture, or both• women and girls at risk• refugees with legal or physical protection needs, or both• refugees with medical needs or disabilities• children and adolescents at risk• persons at risk due to sexual orientation/gender identity• refugees with family links	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• child carers• children in detention• children with specific medical needs• children with disabilities• child survivors of (or at risk of) violence, abuse or exploitation including sexual and gender based violence• children at risk of harmful traditional practices (e.g. child marriage and FGM)• children without legal documentation• children at risk of refoulement• children at risk of not attending school• children associated with armed forces or armed groups• children at risk of child labour or already working

Those recognised as refugees by the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) are referred to the UK's Resettlement Team, a joint unit between the Home Office and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Hereafter referred to as simply "the Home Office". Refugees resettled through these schemes are granted five years' refugee leave on arrival in the UK.

Support from local authorities for refugee resettlement has grown significantly over the last few years in response to the real need of those fleeing conflict and persecution. The local authorities involved receive funding which contributes towards the costs of delivering support to refugee families.

More information can be found in the Local Government Association guide for local authorities: <https://www.local.gov.uk/syrian-refugee-resettlement-guide-local-authorities>

Community Sponsorship

A complementary approach

The Community Sponsorship Scheme which was launched in July 2016, complements the resettlement undertaken by local authorities. Under community sponsorship, it is members of the local community that are responsible for finding a property and delivering resettlement support to a resettled family; not local government officers or contracted NGOs. It is the community sponsor's responsibility to support the resettled family from the moment of arrival in the UK. This will include:

- meeting the family at the airport;
- providing a warm welcome and cultural orientation;
- providing housing;
- supporting access to education, and to medical and social services;
- ensuring access to English language tuition;
- supporting attendance at local Job Centre Plus appointments and assistance with navigating social welfare provision; and
- support towards employment and self-sufficiency.

Community sponsors provide integration support for a family for the first year of their time in the UK, and accommodation for the first two years. Full details of the requirements for sponsors are set out in the community sponsorship guidance for prospective sponsors on GOV.UK.

When local groups deliver this kind of support, and liaise with local authorities, often community members with untapped skills and resources are discovered and are able to contribute to successful resettlement using the wide range of skills and experience and goodwill that is present in all our communities. Community sponsor groups will often include trained professionals, such as teachers, medical and social workers, for example. Community sponsors will often use their own networks to encourage landlords previously unknown to local authorities to offer a property at a lower rate. In this way, Community Sponsorship can catalyse communities to participate in supporting vulnerable people, to volunteer and to engage with public policy in new ways.

Bringing communities together around a common cause and mobilising large numbers of people into action can also play a part in facilitating some underrepresented groups to develop stronger links with the council, and each other. It can help to identify local leaders, strengthen local capabilities and encourage stronger communities.

10 Steps to Community Sponsorship

Community groups considering sponsoring a family must apply to the Home Office for approval. This process is managed by the Home Office. The local authority's involvement in this process comes in at **steps 2, 5, 8 and 10**. Groups are encouraged to begin discussions with local authorities early in the application process to help build a positive working relationship. This can help to determine who the appropriate local authority contact will be, what the expected consent process will look like and the likely timescales involved. Early collaboration can be used to set out both local authority and sponsor expectations from the process and secure political and officer support.

To become a community sponsor a community group must:

1	<p><u>Be a registered charity or Community Interest Company (CIC)</u> Groups can secure charitable status in their own right, or work with an existing charity as a “lead sponsor”, such as a local faith group or a national organisation.</p>
2	<p><u>Have secured a suitable self-contained property with a 24-month tenancy</u> The rent should ideally be set at or below the Local Housing Allowance rate to enable the family to afford it with the social welfare income they receive. Where the LHA rate does not meet the full rental cost, groups would need to show that they had considered the available funds and potential expenditure, and had budgeted accordingly. The Home Office will discuss with groups the ongoing affordability and sustainability of the accommodation secured for the family. Groups can seek ‘approval in principle with conditions’ prior to securing a property to help avoid long void periods. In these cases groups will complete all other aspects of the application and their resettlement plan based on the likely area in which they will eventually find a property.</p> <p>Sponsor groups are required to invite the local authority to inspect the property and local authorities may wish to assist the community sponsor by visiting the proposed property to assess its health and safety, i.e. whether or not it complies with local authority guidance on occupation levels, is in a proper state of structural repair, has safe electricity and/or gas supplies, adequate ventilation and lighting, etc. Groups are also asked to contact the Police Safer Neighbourhood Team to ensure it is appropriate to house a refugee family in the area. Local Authorities may also be able to provide assistance with background checks, and will often have local knowledge which may be relevant to assessing the suitability of the proposed housing area.</p>

	<p><i>“Our Environmental Services team inspected the property, as they would for any property on the private rental market. In this case some minor issues were raised. These were passed on to the Letting Agent who will address them before the property is rented out. We (the Local Authority) had translated the Tenancy Agreement, Refuse/Recycling advice and Fire notices into Arabic and copies of these were given to the groups to help support the tenancy.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Ceredigion LA on Accommodation</p>
	<p><i>“A key factor for us has been that the Salvation Army is housing the family for two years in a property it owns. Merton London Borough Council does not participate in the VPRS programme for local authorities because of the pressures on social housing, but the community sponsorship scheme has helped us to find a housing solution.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Merton London Borough Council on Accommodation</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">3</p>	<p><u>Be able to prove that they have funds available</u> This is a minimum of £9000 to support a resettled family. The £9,000 is to demonstrate that groups have a minimum level of financial resources to support a resettled family (such as the initial provision of cash on arrival, additional housing costs, funding English language provision, and interpretation costs). The actual costs will vary by sponsor group and it is not a suggested minimum or maximum spend. The level of resourcing behind each application will be considered by the Home Office on a case-by-case basis.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">4</p>	<p><u>Put together a proposal of how they will support a refugee family</u> This includes completing a comprehensive application form including a resettlement plan. The group must also draw up a safeguarding policy ensuring that appropriate reporting and escalation procedures, and vetting of volunteers, are in place. Sponsor groups are required to invite the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board (LSCB) to comment on their safeguarding policy and the local authority may wish to facilitate engagement between the group and the LSCB to enable this to happen.</p> <p><i>“The community group held an initial meeting with us (the local authority) to run through their plans. We gave them feedback, made some suggestions and also advised the group on their safeguarding policy and procedures. We drew up a report that assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the plan and carried out an Integrated Impact Assessment. The resulting paper was then taken to Scrutiny Committee with a request to recommend that Cabinet approve the group’s application to undertake Community Sponsorship of refugees in Ceredigion.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Ceredigion LA on Resettlement Plans</p>

5	<p>Have consent from the local authority --to submit an application to the Home Office. (This may include both the upper and lower tier authorities in two tier areas). Further information on this step can be found below on page 10.</p> <p><i>“We supported the Salvation Army’s application to the government every step of the way. I have been really impressed by their commitment and willingness to anticipate the family’s needs.”</i></p> <p>Yvette Stanley, Merton London Borough Council</p>
6	<p><u>Apply to the Home Office formally, and have their application considered.</u> As part of this process, the Home Office will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verify the group’s charitable status • Perform a series of security checks on the lead sponsor – where it is considered appropriate the Home Office may also conduct checks on individual members of the group • Ensure that the group has in place a robust and organised structure with clear lines of accountability, i.e. in terms of decision-making, safeguarding the family • Consider the organisation’s suitable experience • See evidence that housing is available for a minimum of two years • Examine the quality and content of the group’s resettlement plan which explains how they will deliver support and integration • Be satisfied that the group has a safeguarding policy in place • See evidence that the group has met the financial criteria • Conduct a pre-approval visit to question the prospective sponsor group on their application (note that the local authority is invited to attend) • Confirm that representatives of the group have attended the relevant Community Sponsorship training. • Be satisfied that appropriate English language tuition and interpreters will be available • Sign a legally-binding Sponsor Agreement with the community group to deliver resettlement as a community sponsor.
7	<p>If approved, <u>receive details of a potential family from the Home Office</u>, to be jointly considered by the community sponsor and the local authority (see next step).</p>
8	<p><u>Accept the family.</u> The local authority is consulted for their agreement to accept the family for resettlement based on whether the proposed family’s needs can be met in the local authority area. Depending on each individual case, individuals from key statutory agencies can be called on to inform this decision. The local authority is asked to accept each and every family. This decision cannot be made by the community sponsor alone.</p>

9	Review and confirm acceptance of the family to the Home Office.
10	The community sponsor prepares to welcome the resettled family at the airport and take them to their new home. The Home Office will arrange monitoring meetings after the resettled family has arrived, either by in-person visits or by digital communications at the Home Office's discretion, to support monitoring and evaluation of the sponsorship arrangement. The local authority will be invited to attend.

Local Authority Involvement

Where do you come in?

The responsibility for assessing and approving applications from community groups and managing the community sponsorship process lies with the Home Office.

However, local authorities have an important role to play in the process, and local authority consent is required for each community sponsorship arrangement in their area – at two stages, as outlined above and set out in more detail below. This is to allow local authorities to consider the local impacts of additional resettled families, such as on local services and capacity, and to give local authorities a mechanism by which to raise any objections they might have to the sponsor group proposing to support a resettled family.

In summary, local authorities can support community groups by:

- Putting groups in contact with the Local Safeguarding Children's Board to advise on the group's safeguarding policy;
- Arranging an inspection of the proposed accommodation;
- Supporting engagement of relevant partners in line with the sponsor's resettlement plan, e.g. police, Job Centres, Prevent etc;
- Supporting groups through schools admissions process;
- Providing local authority consent that the group can operate as a community sponsor in the area (Local Authority Consent 1 – see below), and
- After approval of the group by the Home Office, agree that the group can accept the refugee family (Local Authority Consent 2 – see below).

"Sutton Council was delighted to help our partners from Sutton Deanery in preparing for and receiving a family from Syria. The application process was a little tricky for a small community group to navigate alone and our officers were able to help provide information and advice as part of that. We also assisted in setting up a robust safeguarding arrangement, including access to training, and suggestions of contacts in partner organisations that could help.

Ultimately the Council is very grateful to Sutton Deanery as the group that drove this forward and our support was minimal in comparison to their efforts, however it was good to note that our Head of Commissioning & Corporate Improvement was on hand to fix a broken door lock when visiting the new property rather than simply manage bureaucratic process!"

Councillor Ruth Dombey, Leader of Sutton Council

Local Authority Consent 1: The Community Group

The prospective sponsor must obtain written evidence from the local authority (the format to be determined by the local authority area e.g. may differ between unitary and two-tier authorities) that they consent to the approval of the application. Typically, this consent is provided by the Chief Executive Officer, Director or Councillor with the authority to consent on behalf of the local authority. It is open to the local authority to decide on how consent will be considered locally.

- Grounds on which a local authority might object are:
- insufficient capacity to provide certain crucial local services in the proposed housing area (e.g. lack of school places);
- concerns about community tensions in the proposed housing area;
- where they have a strong reason to believe that the community sponsor is not suitable to undertake the resettlement of vulnerable adults and children; or
- another appropriate reason.

Local Authority Consent 2: The Refugee Family

Once approved, the Home Office will provide the local authority and the sponsoring group with case and medical notes about a proposed family via the secure IT system MOVEit. Where the sponsorship arrangement is in a council area where there are no other resettled refugees, the council will need to contact the Home Office to be given access to MOVEit. This responsibility can fall to the county council or the district council and is for the local authorities to decide for their area.

Before the sponsorship can proceed, the local authority must agree to accept the proposed refugee family, as must the sponsoring group. Liaison with key partners may be necessary to make an assessment of whether the family's needs can be met.

- Grounds on which a local authority might object to a proposed refugee family are:
- a medical condition that requires specific treatment that is not available within a reasonable distance;
- lack of school places within a reasonable distance;
- other specific needs that cannot reasonably be met in the local area.

The local authority will also want to take into consideration any interventions that the sponsoring group themselves might be able to put in place.

The Sponsor Arrangement

The first two years

Community Sponsors are responsible for supporting a refugee family for a minimum period of 12 months after their arrival in the UK, and providing accommodation for a minimum period of 24 months.

“The Salvation Army has taken the lead in co-ordinating support for the family; drawing on resources within its own congregation [...] they have also followed up on all the links that we have made for them to ensure support is there for the family from day one.”

Merton London Borough Council

Sponsorship placements are currently reviewed by the Home Office at regular intervals after arrival through monitoring meetings. The local authority will be invited to attend these meetings.

Towards the end of the first year, the Home Office discusses with the sponsor and the local authority about ongoing support needs of the family, and, if there are ongoing support needs, how these will be met from 12 months onwards.

If the sponsoring group end their support after one year they must have a suitable transition plan for the family at the 12-month point and the local authority may need to liaise with the sponsoring group at the end of 12 months to consider if the family requires additional support. Direct funding is available for local authorities to claim for years 2-5, determined on a case-by-case basis.

Funding may also be available during the first year in the event that new support needs arise which cannot be met by the sponsoring group, or the sponsoring group is unable to deliver adequate support, or the sponsorship arrangement breaks down (also see below).

How does funding work?

Neither community sponsors nor local authorities receive year one tariff funding for community sponsorship cases. The sponsoring group takes full responsibility for resourcing and delivering the family's needs according to a statement of requirements, similar to that for local authorities.

Local authorities will be entitled to claim funding in year one towards education costs in line with council-led resettlement schemes. This amounts to £4,500 for children aged 5 to 18 and £2,250 for children aged 3 to 4. Authorities are also entitled to claim £850 ESOL funding for each adult refugee arriving through community sponsorship and must ensure that those refugees supported by community sponsors benefit from any money claimed for these refugees.

Funding for years 2 to 5 may be available to local authorities. This will be determined on a case-by-case basis following a review of the needs of the resettled family and how they will be met. Local authorities can make a business case to the Home Office to apply for the money. Local authorities should contact the Community Sponsorship Team for more information. See below for contact details.

Community sponsor groups receiving a family on or after 1st November 2018 will be entitled to claim actual void costs, capped at 8 weeks' Local Housing Allowance rate. Community sponsor groups will be able to make a claim direct with the Home Office after the resettled family has arrived. The payment of void costs for sponsor groups will extend to the lifetime of the current Vulnerable Persons and Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Schemes up to 2020.

What about housing after 2 years?

Housing is to be provided by sponsors for a minimum of two years. Sponsors are expected to work with the family to support understanding of social welfare, banking, budgeting, house contracts and rents and to secure a smooth transition to sustainable accommodation if required. A meeting between the sponsoring group and local authority in advance would allow housing issues and options to be discussed. In the unlikely event that a family becomes homeless the local authority would be expected to consider housing for the family in accordance with their normal procedures.

How will the local authority and group work together to communicate and mitigate these issues?

"In 2016, it was clear that there was significant interest in Community Sponsorship Schemes in Pembrokeshire and when Cabinet pledged support to the SVPRS programme in November 2016, it directed a close working relationship with the various Croeso groups to develop this. Representatives from Croeso Arberth and Croeso Abergwaun were invited to attend the multi-agency meeting process which looked at the implementation of the programme from a strategic perspective but which also prepared the way for the arrival of the first LA family. This in turn helped the Community Sponsorship groups prepare for their first families. It was agreed that the matching panel process would be the same for LA and community sponsored families with a coordinator of the Croeso groups attending each panel.

By working closely together, the Local Authority and Croeso groups are able to share what has worked with their families, what hasn't gone so well, and how things can be improved. They have been able to share the ESOL provision and interpreter support. The success of the project has been demonstrated by the mutual support between the Croeso groups and the LA."

Pembrokeshire Case Study

Sponsorship Breakdown

What happens in the case of sponsorship breakdown?

A sponsorship arrangement could breakdown because the resettled family chooses to leave the community sponsorship arrangement and live elsewhere. This scenario is the same for the wider resettlement scheme – where in such cases, the family will no longer benefit from the additional support provided under the Programme.

In the event that sponsorship breakdown occurs due to the sponsor being unable to deliver their commitments, the care for the resettled family would fall to the local authority. Our priority would be to continue support to the family and the Home Office would support the local authority with this transition.

The combination of a robust approval process, sponsor induction, and ongoing monitoring of sponsors all mitigates the risk of sponsorship breakdown. Nevertheless, although we consider the risk to be very low, there will inevitably be rare occurrences of sponsorship breakdown.

What about costs falling to Local Authorities?

In the event that a sponsorship arrangement breaks down, an appropriate level of funding will be made available to the local authority, within the existing tariff structure, to provide the necessary support to the resettled family. It is intended that the local authority will not suffer financially.

What happens when sponsorship breaks down in an LA area which does not support the main scheme and therefore doesn't have the necessary skills/experience?

Local authorities will have consented to each community sponsorship arrangement in their area. Those local authorities who do not support the wider resettlement scheme and may not have the necessary skills or experience to support the resettled family, will want to consider how to mitigate this risk in advance, such as identifying another local authority, or a local organisation, with relevant expertise to whom they could turn for support if required. In some cases, it may be possible for another community sponsor group to take over. If this happens sponsors will be expected to ensure a smooth transition to local authority support or another community sponsor in the event of breakdown.

What Next?

Where to go for more information

If you have not already done so, please visit the Community Sponsorship page at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-for-full-community-sponsorship> where guidance for prospective sponsors, an application form, application guidance notes and a sample sponsor agreement can be found.

If you would like to contact the Home Office about the Community Sponsorship Scheme, please email: communitysponsorship@homeoffice.gov.uk

The Home Office team are ready to provide you with further information and respond to any questions that you may have about the Scheme. They are also willing to attend local authority meetings to provide further information about sponsorship.

Regional leads on refugee resettlement can give advice and connect local authorities with other councils who have been through the process.

Regional Strategic Migration Partnership Contact List		
East of England	Gosia Strona	Malgorzata.Strona@eelga.gov.uk
East Midlands	Sarah Short	Sarah.Short@emcouncils.gov.uk
London	Nicola Marven	Nicola.Marven@london.gov.uk
North East	Janine Hartley	Janine_Hartley@middlesbrough.gov.uk
North West	Katie Jones	Katie.Jones@manchester.gov.uk
Northern Ireland		race.equality@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk
Scotland	Andrew Morrison	Andrew@cosla.gov.uk
South East	Roy Millard Susan Fawcus (Resettlement Coordinator)	RoyMillard@secouncils.gov.uk sespm@secouncils.gov.uk
South West	Kelly-Anne Phillips	kelly-anne.phillips@swcouncils.gov.uk
Wales	Anne Hubbard	Anne.Hubbard@wlga.gov.uk
West Midlands	Dally Panesar	Dalvinder.Panesar@birmingham.gov.uk
Yorkshire and Humberside	David Brown	admin@migrationyorkshire.org.uk