

Housing Working Party

Minutes of a Meeting of the **Housing Working Party** held in the **Telscombe Room, Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes** on **Monday, 6 February 2017** at 2.00pm

Present:

Councillors R Maskell (Chair), M Chartier, S Davy, B Giles, T Rowell, S Saunders and R Turner

Officers Attending:

A Chequers, Head of Customer Service
Z Downton, Committee Officer
J Perkins, Housing Needs Manager

Also Present:

Councillor S Murray, Lewes District Council
J Langley, Tenants' Representative
D Twitchen, Tenants' Representative

Minutes

1 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

2 Apology for Absence

An apology for absence had been received from Councillor Joanna Carter, Lewes District Council, who had been invited to attend the meeting.

3 The Council's duties to asylum seekers and refugees

The Committee received Report No 33/17 which provided an explanation of the Council's duties to asylum seekers, refugees and unaccompanied minors and which sought to clarify the responsibilities of the Home Office and Local Authorities when assisting asylum seekers and refugees.

The Housing Needs Manager drew the Working Party's attention to the following definitions, as set out within the Report:

- As detailed under paragraphs 3 to 5 of the Report, asylum seekers were defined as being over 18 years old or families with children that came to the UK seeking asylum and fleeing their country of origin outside of the

Action

European Union. Contrary to some myths, Local Authorities were not responsible for housing asylum seekers with any type of housing, including social housing, or providing support. Support was provided by organisations commissioned by the Home Office.

- Paragraph 6 outlined that unaccompanied children were asylum seekers if under the age of 18 years old. Lewes District Council did not have a responsibility to accommodate or support unaccompanied children as this was the responsibility of East Sussex County Council (ESCC). As at January 2017, there were 24 children who had been accommodated in the care of ESCC and would remain in care until they were 18 years old.
- Refugees had completed the asylum process and had been granted definite or indefinite leave to remain in the UK, as explained under paragraphs 7 and 8. Once granted refugee status they had the same rights as British citizens and were free to move around the country and were not required to inform the Home Office or any other organisation of their whereabouts. Refugees had no automatic right to access social housing but their housing and support needs would be assessed in the same way as any other British citizen. The Housing Needs Manager clarified that refugees did not need a local connection to settle in an area in order to get housing assistance but would have to prove their eligibility, the same as any British citizen, to gain that assistance.
- Paragraphs 9 and 10 reported that all Local Authorities had been asked by the Government to accommodate a certain number of Syrian refugees through the Resettlement Programme. The Council had pledged to accommodate and resettle 40 individuals by 2020. Local Authorities were expected to locate suitable accommodation and were allocated a family that would match the accommodation.

Further to a request by Ms Twitchen, Tenants' Representative, the Committee Officer would send to her a copy of the presentation slides used by the Housing Needs Manager, a copy of which is contained in the Minute Book.

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The Chair thanked the Housing Needs Manager for her Report and clear explanations.

Resolved:

- 3.1** That Report No 33/17 be noted.

4 The Syrian Resettlement Programme

The Committee received Report No 34/17 which provided councillors with an update on the Government's Syrian Resettlement Programme.

In September 2015, the UK Government had made a commitment to resettle 20,000 Syrian people who were currently displaced and living in refugee camps in countries neighbouring Syria.

Local Authorities in the UK were asked to make commitments that would help meet that target. The District and Borough Councils in East Sussex had

committed to resettle up to 260 individuals by 2020 as part of the Programme. Lewes District Council had committed to accommodating 40 out of the 260 individuals.

The Working Group queried how the exact number of individuals had been determined for the Council. In response, the Head of Customer Services explained that he understood the figure, set by East Sussex County Council, had been based on a percentage of the total population of the Lewes District. He would get back to members of the Working Party with the actual calculations.

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Discussion moved to the funding behind the Resettlement Programme. Paragraph 5 of the Report outlined that central Government would provide tapered funding over a 5 year period to Local Authorities that had signed up to the Programme, with an initial large payment of £8.5k per individual in the first year of resettlement. The Housing Needs Manager added that the first amount could be claimed by a Local Authority once a refugee had landed in the country, and funding could be claimed up to 3 times per year thereafter. She explained that the principle of the Programme was that the level of support would decrease over time and those people would not necessarily require 5 complete years of support.

The Working Party also noted that the Council had contributed £4,350 towards funding 'Syrian Coordinators' posts. It had been identified that the Programme would require dedicated resources and those 12-month posts would assist all Local Authorities with the complex arrangements of resettlement.

The Housing Needs Manager updated the Working Party on the progress the Council had made in resettling families. She informed councillors that, as at January 2017, the Council had resettled three families (23 individuals) in Seaford and Newhaven. She also highlighted the initial challenges, the main hurdle being the language barrier and the high level of translation costs in the first month of resettlement.

The Housing Needs Manager commended the exceptional and well organised volunteer network in Lewes District that had come forward in support of the Resettlement Programme.

In response to a councillor's question, the Housing Needs Manager clarified that Syrian refugees were granted 5 years leave to remain in the UK. After 5 years they would need to reapply for their refugee status and right to remain in the country.

Resolved:

- 4.1** That Report No 34/17 be noted.

5 Date of Next Meeting

Resolved:

- 5.1** That it be noted that the next meeting of the Working Party be called as necessary.

**All to
note**

The meeting ended at 2:45pm.

R Maskell
Chair