



Lewes District Council

To all Members of the Housing Working Party

A meeting of the **Housing Working Party** will be held in the **Telscombe Room, Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes** on **Monday, 06 February 2017 at 14:00** which you are requested to attend.

Please note the venue for this meeting which is wheelchair accessible and has an induction loop to help people who are hearing impaired.

This meeting may be filmed, recorded or broadcast by any person or organisation. Anyone wishing to film or record must notify the Chair prior to the start of the meeting. Members of the public attending the meeting are deemed to have consented to be filmed or recorded, as liability for this is not within the Council's control.

25/01/2017

Catherine Knight
Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services

Agenda

1 Minutes (page 3)

To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2013 (attached herewith for information)

2 Apologies for Absence/Declaration of Substitute Councillors/Declarations of Interest

3 The Council's duties to asylum seekers and refugees (page 8)

To receive the Report of the Housing Needs Manager (Report No 33/17 herewith)

4 The Syrian Resettlement Programme (page 11)

To receive the Report of the Housing Needs Manager (Report No 34/17 herewith)

5 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Housing Working Party will be called as necessary.

For further information about items appearing on this Agenda, please contact
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Distribution: Councillors R Maskell (Chair), M Chartier, S Davy, B Giles, T Rowell,
S Saunders and R Turner



Lewes District Council

Housing Working Party

Minutes of a meeting of the **Housing Working Party** held in the **Yarrow Room, Lewes Town Hall, High Street, Lewes** on **Tuesday 17 December 2013 at 2.00pm**

Present:

Councillors I A Nicholson (Chair), M P Chartier, S B Davy, P Gander, E C Merry and S J Osborne

Officers Attending:

A Blanshard, Committee Officer
A Chequers, Corporate Head – Housing Services
S Horne, Head of Housing Management
J Jacks, Housing Needs Manager

Also Present:

D Forsdike, Tenants' Representative
A Hill, Tenants' Representative

	Minutes	Action
5	Minutes	
	The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.	
6	Apologies for Absence	
	Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors R Blackman and S Saunders	
7	The Impact of Welfare Reform on Lewes District Council Tenants	

The Working Party considered Report No 209/13 which updated members on Welfare Reforms and their effect on the Council's tenants. The Head of Housing Management introduced the Report which set out the facts and figures of the impact on the Council's tenants. She drew particular attention to the success that had been made in tenants downsizing by transferring properties and the Tenants Incentive Scheme.

The Chair thanked the Head of Housing Management for producing the Report. The Working Party expressed concern that the number of tenants on Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) was likely to increase. The Corporate Head – Housing Services explained that officers were monitoring

the situation on a monthly basis and that those tenants who had opted to remain in their current property and pay from existing resources would be regularly checked to ensure that they were not placing themselves in a position of debt to manage payments. The Housing Needs Manager explained that the Council had more DHP funding available for this municipal year than had been anticipated, and that the provision of DHP funds to the Council for the next two years had been increased.

The Working Party asked whether there had been any tenants who had fallen into arrears as a result of Social Sector Size Criteria – the abolition of the Spare Room Subsidy for Social Housing tenants. The Corporate Head – Housing Services explained that to date there had been two notices issued to seek possession and the progress of both was being monitored. The Head of Housing Management added that current figures showed a rent collection figure of 98.6% which the Working Party agreed was excellent.

The Tenants' Representatives welcomed the high rent collection rates but expressed concern about where tenants were finding the extra funds to pay the shortfall in their rents. The Corporate Head – Housing Services shared this concern and explained to the Working Party that officers were working with Tenants of Lewes District (TOLD) to gather evidence on this issue. He explained that it was not appropriate for tenants to be asked directly, but that officers would approach tenants to check that they were coping and advise on any issues they might have. He added that the Rent Arrears team was monitoring the issue and that, if they raised any concerns, he would escalate the matter to the Corporate Management Team and Cabinet to ensure the resources were available to allow the team to take preventative actions. The Tenants' Representatives added that broader and increased promotion of the Tenants Incentive Scheme might also assist tenants.

The Working Party suggested that monetary advice be included in each new tenant's pack. The Head of Housing Management explained that all new tenants were seen by Rent Officers who provided advice on the help and assistance that was available.

The Working Party also wanted to record their recognition and appreciation of the way officers had coped with the extra work that had been required of them.

The Working Party asked the Head of Housing Management if the Council was encouraging tenants to forward plan and be aware of the future impact that the reforms might have on them. The Corporate Head – Housing Services agreed that this was a good idea and that officers could discuss with the Housing Benefit Team about potential profiling of tenants and, if possible, use this for prevention planning.

Action

CH-HS

The Chair read a letter to the Working Party which had been received from a Councillor relating to paragraph 2.2 of the Report, the content of this letter was noted but without further comment. A copy of the letter is contained in the Minute Book.

	Action
<p>The Working Party queried how Discretionary Housing Payment was allocated. They asked officers whether the Working Party could be shown how discretion was exercised. The Corporate Head – Housing Services informed the Working Party that the DHP policy had been reported to a meeting of the Cabinet on 23 April 2013. He added that if the Working Party wanted more information, the Benefits Operations Manager could report to members on the criteria that was used during the allocation of the DHP.</p> <p><u>Resolved:</u></p> <p class="list-item-l1">7.1 That the impact of Welfare Reform on Lewes District Council Tenants, as outlined in Report No 209/13, be noted; and</p> <p class="list-item-l1">7.2 That the Corporate Head – Housing Services be requested to submit further reports to the Housing Working Party on the impact of Welfare Reform to the Council's Tenants when necessary.</p>	
<p>8 Tenancy Policy for Lewes District Council</p> <p>The Working Party considered Report No 210/13 which sought to clarify the Council's position on the use of Flexible Tenancies and the Council's Succession Policy, prior to a period of consultation. The Head of Housing Management outlined the details of the Report and explained that the Localism Act 2011 had introduced Flexible Tenancies, a new form of Social Housing tenure. Flexible Tenancies were for a specified limited term and were renewable at the discretion of the housing provider. Government guidance was that, for most, this period should be for a minimum of five years.</p> <p>The Head of Housing Management explained that the Council needed to decide whether to use this type of tenure and, if adopted, on a time period and if any particular property type, such as sheltered accommodation, should be excluded. The Working Party noted that the Welfare Reform provisions on the removal of the Spare Room Subsidy had already provided an incentive to downsize for families who were over occupying properties.</p> <p>The Housing Needs Manager informed the Working Party that the introduction of Flexible Tenancies would require considerable administration by officers, but that this was not a reason to decide against adoption of them. The Housing Needs Manager explained to the Working Party that the numbers of tenants affected would be limited and that more might be persuaded to downsize through the effects of Welfare Reform. The Head of Housing Management informed the Working Party that a consultation was planned for January 2014, but that the Council was reluctant to start until they had sought the views of the Housing Working Party. This consultation would be with both existing tenants and those people on the Housing waiting list. She assured the Working Party that the Council would be mindful of its thoughts when conducting the consultation and would return to a meeting of the Working Party with the results.</p> <p>The Corporate Head – Housing Services added that should the Housing</p>	CH-HS

Action

Working Party decide that it did not want to progress the adoption of Flexible Tenancies at the current time, the option would still be available to the Council should circumstances change.

A discussion followed during which the Working Party asked if all existing tenancies would be replaced with Flexible Tenancies. The Head of Housing Management explained that existing tenancies would remain as they are, it would only affect new tenants of the Council. The Working Party was interested in how other Local Authorities and Housing Associations that had adopted Flexible Tenancies were progressing. The Housing Needs Manager explained that this was difficult to quantify as the system was so new but that relevant Authorities could be contacted for their feedback on the system.

The Working Party discussed many possible effects and concerns and established that at the current time, and with the limited information available, it did not feel able to make an informed decision on the introduction of Flexible Tenancies. The Working Party agreed that it was not yet convinced by the argument for Flexible Tenancies, but that it wished to see how such a proposal would work in practice.

CH-HS

The Working Party then considered the changes to the rules of succession that had been introduced by the Localism Act 2011, and affected all new tenancies taken up after 1 April 2012. This change limited the right of succession to a secure council tenancy simply to the spouse or partner of a tenant, unless specifically stated otherwise in the Tenancy Agreement. The Working Party discussed the potential impact of the succession rules and how this might affect the tenants.

The Working Party asked for clarification of the term 'one reasonable offer'. The Corporate Head – Housing Services explained that this meant a property which was suitable for the tenant's needs, in as near an area to their current property, and took into consideration any special circumstances.

Resolved:

- 8.1** That the Corporate Head – Housing Services be requested to report the results of the tenants consultation on the introduction of Flexible Tenancies, including potential scenarios and comparisons to a future meeting of the Housing Working Party; and
- 8.2** That the rules of succession for new tenancies be maintained as existing under the Localism Act, and that a policy of one reasonable offer of suitable accommodation to the qualifying member of the family who, under previous legislation, would have succeeded the tenancy, be adopted.

CH-HS

	Action
<p>9 Date of Next Meeting</p> <p><u>Resolved:</u></p> <p>9.1 That it be noted that the next meeting of the Working Party be called as necessary.</p> <p>The meeting ended at 3.00pm</p>	<p>All to note/CO</p>

I A Nicholson
Chair

Agenda Item No: 3 **Report No:** 33/17

Report Title: **The Council's duties to asylum seekers and refugees**

Report To: **Housing Working Party** **Date:** **6 February 2017**

Cabinet Member: **Councillor Ron Maskell, Lead Member for Housing**

Ward(s) Affected: **All**

Report By: **Jennie Perkins**
Housing Needs Manager
jperkins@lewes.gov.uk

Purpose of Report:

To provide an explanation of the Council's duties to Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Unaccompanied Minors.

Officers Recommendation(s):

- 1 To note the content of the report

Background

1. The process for dealing with immigration to the UK from households from outside the EU is sometimes misunderstood. The issue of immigration is often the focus in political debate and the recent media coverage of the challenges in Calais and the displaced families from Syria has generated global concern. Local communities are, more than ever, coming forward with offers of assistance and Local Authorities are being instructed to assist the Government in dealing with certain groups of refugees.
2. This report seeks to clarify the responsibilities of the Home Office and Local Authorities when assisting asylum seekers and refugees.
3. **Asylum seekers** are over 18 years old or families with children that come to the UK seeking asylum and fleeing their country of origin outside of the European Union. They are accommodated and supported by the Home Office in private accommodation which is sourced and leased in designated areas in agreement with the Local Authority. These areas are known as 'dispersal areas' which are only in Hastings, Southampton and Portsmouth in the south east. Asylum seekers must remain in the dispersal area accommodation whilst their application for asylum is assessed.

4. Local Authorities do not assist asylum seekers with any type of housing or support. Support is provided by organisations commissioned by the Home Office. In the south east the housing and support service is delivered by Clearspings. Asylum seekers are not able to access any other type of housing, they are not entitled to any public funds and they are not able to take up paid employment whilst their asylum claim is being determined. Contrary to some myths, Local Authorities do not house asylum seekers in social housing.
5. If an application for asylum is refused, an asylum seeker is considered to be a 'failed asylum seeker' and the Home Office will seek to deport the household. There is an option for the household to appeal the decision and they remain supported by the Home Office during this time.
6. **Unaccompanied Children** are asylum seekers under the age of 18. They come to the UK without an adult and are accommodated by the County Council and placed into the care of the Local Authority. East Sussex County Council is responsible for accommodating and supporting all unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Lewes District Council does not have a responsibility to accommodate or support unaccompanied children. As at January 2017, 24 children were accommodated and in the care of East Sussex County Council and will remain in care until they are 18 years old.
7. **Refugees** have completed the asylum process and have been granted leave to remain in the UK. This can be definite leave to remain which entitles them to settle permanently. Alternatively they are given indefinite leave to remain which is time limited and their case is reviewed at the end of the period. Once they are granted refugee status they have the same rights as British citizens. They are free to move around the Country and are not required to inform the Home Office or any other organisation of their whereabouts.
8. The housing and support arrangement is terminated within 28 days of their asylum application decision being granted and confirmed. Refugees can claim benefits, take up employment and access housing assistance from the Local Authority. They can claim homelessness once their accommodation with the Home Office is terminated and are assessed in accordance with the legislation. Refugees' housing and support needs are assessed in the same way as any other British citizen and they do not have an automatic right to access social housing.
9. **Syrian Refugees** can be part of a Government resettlement scheme where they are granted refugee status in the camps they occupy in the surrounding countries of Syria. However not all Syrians coming to Britain are part of the scheme and some come to England independently as asylum seekers.
10. All Local Authorities have been asked by the Government to accommodate a certain number Syrians through the resettlement programme. Lewes District Council has pledged to accommodate and resettle 40 individuals in each area before 2020. Government funding can be drawn down to enable this to happen. Local authorities are expected to locate suitable accommodation and are allocated a family that will match the accommodation. The

accommodation must be fully equipped for the household's arrival with food, clothes, furniture etc. The housing, health, education, language and other support needs are all planned for prior to arrival. This is a new way of dealing with refugees (introduced in 2015) and has been extended to North African countries although Lewes District Council has not committed to participate in any other scheme.

Agenda Item No: 4 **Report No:** 34/17

Report Title: The Syrian Resettlement Programme

Report To: Housing Working Group **Date:** 6 February 2017

Cabinet Member: Councillor Ron Maskell, Lead Member for Housing

Ward(s) Affected: All

Report By: Jennie Perkins
Housing Needs Manager
jperkins@lewes.gov.uk

Purpose of Report:

To provide an update on the Government's Syrian Resettlement Programme.

Officers Recommendation(s):

- 1 To note the content of the report

Background

- 1) In September 2015 UK Government made a commitment to resettle 20,000 Syrian people who are currently displaced and living in Refugee camps in countries neighbouring Syria.
- 2) Local Authorities in the UK were asked to make commitments that would help meet this target. The Districts & Boroughs in East Sussex have committed to resettle up to 260 individuals as part of this programme-spread across the five areas. Lewes District Council, Eastbourne, Wealden and Rother have committed to accommodating 40 individuals and 100 in Hastings.
- 3) Appropriate families are identified and screened via the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). Each family is accepted on the basis of a profile drawn up by UNHCR identifying additional needs that could encompass health, disability, emotional trauma, or special educational needs.
- 4) The unusual part of this programme is that households are granted refugee status in the country they currently reside. They are refugees once they land in the UK as their asylum application has already been processed.

- 5) All families require independent, affordable housing followed up with a holistic support package dependent on their identified needs. Central Government provides tapered funding over a 5 year period with an initial large payment of £8.5K per individual in the first year.
- 6) All families have access to full UK welfare benefits and have a right to work on arrival. Accommodation is funded initially via Housing Benefit. All accommodation is being sourced via the private rented sector and families require access to universal services across Health, Education & Employment on arrival to the UK.

The East Sussex Resettlement Programme

- 7) As a two tier Local Authority, identifying the appropriate strategic and operational managers needed to ensure all the housing, health and support needs of individual families could be met, took some time. At the outset it was recognised that coordinating this work would need dedicated resources and all the Districts and Boroughs in East Sussex pooled funding to appoint 'Syrian Coordinators'. Hastings Borough Council has taken the lead for this work and the coordinators were appointed in September 2016. Lewes District Council has contributed £4,350 towards these 12 month posts which will assist all Local Authorities with the complex arrangements of resettlement.
- 8) Although the Government has committed funding to ensure all the services can be accessed and there is no additional cost to the Local Authorities, there are different processes for each organisation to claim the money and funding is not provided in advance. It has therefore been necessary to engage a range of finance managers in plans and there will be an ongoing requirement to claim funding at specific intervals over the next few years.
- 9) Three Coordinators (two full-time equivalent posts) have been appointed to support the programme across East Sussex. An Operational Working Group has been formed with a range of key services, including Health, Education, the Police and Children's Services, to ensure that the necessary support is in place when families arrive. The local group decide whether each family offered under the programme can have its needs met locally based on this profile provided by the UNHRC.
- 10) East Sussex Community and Faith Action (ESCAFA): An action group of community and faith leaders for the support of Syrian vulnerable families in East Sussex is ensuring that there is a coordinated approach to donations and volunteers. Through ESCAFA, volunteer hubs have been set up in each Local Authority area and plans are underway to deliver a Befriending Training programme for volunteers across East Sussex.
- 11) Charter flights are planned to arrive in Gatwick and Stanstead on a 6 weekly cycle. Once accommodation is identified the coordinators work closely with the Home Office to ensure a suitable family is able to access seats on the flight. Coordinators are required to greet the family at the airport and take them to their new home. If necessary the Home Office will arrange scheduled

flights to ensure the accommodation can be utilised. Funding can be used to cover the void costs for up to eight weeks whilst families are identified.

- 12)The accommodation must be prepared for the family's arrival. All furniture, fixtures and fittings must be suitable for their needs. In addition soft furnishings and household goods are supplied. Clothes and toys are sourced and a weekly grocery shop is provided. Whilst the family await their benefit claim to be processed, the coordinators are authorised to provide a small amount of cash. These requirements are set out in Government guidance for Local Authorities participating in the scheme. The guidance also confirms what is not to be purchased with the funding, such as televisions and computers.
- 13)Intensive support is provided daily during the first few weeks to ensure the family can open a bank account, claim benefits, access health care and access language courses. Interpreters are crucial to enable this to happen. Other support to ensure families can integrate into their community is crucial and so much more successful with the support of volunteers. The level of support needed generally decreases after the first few weeks as families settle into their new life.

Progress made in resettling families

- 14)Approximately 3,000 individuals had been settled around the country at the end of 2016, with 300 of those housed in the south east. As at January 2017, Lewes District Council has resettled three families in Seaford and Newhaven. A total of 23 individuals are now housed in the Lewes District. Eastbourne has housed four people, eight people are accommodated in Wealden, Hastings has ten people and Rother are yet to house any Syrian families through this programme. All these individuals have been settled between October 2016 and January 2017.
- 15)To date families with 'less complex' needs have been accepted into East Sussex but this may change as the programme develops and as support networks strengthen. Support for all families accepted into East Sussex is being developed using the voluntary sector in addition to the support from the Local Authorities and other statutory organisations. Volunteers offer practical support for families, assisting with integration, translation, the provision of furniture and clothing and introduction of families to community activities.

Considerations going forward

- 16)As the number of Syrian families relocating to East Sussex has increased in the past few months, the demand for interpreting services has increased as a direct result. Local Authorities are utilising offers of assistance to help with interpreting from volunteers, although the option to employ an Arabic speaking support worker/translator will need to be considered.

- 17)The range of support the coordinators are required to arrange is resource intensive. Commissioning some of the support services through external providers could be an option going forwards if it's a viable solution. It's a particularly attractive option for translating services and education services which to date have been costly and resource intensive to manage in house.
- 18)Sourcing affordable accommodation in the private rented sector in the south east has been very challenging and is reflected in the relatively low numbers housed in the area to date. Lewes has been fortunate to secure accommodation to date, but the general affordability issue and increasing costs in accessing accommodation must be relayed to the Home Office and Central Government.
- 19)It is important to continue to work with partners to ensure there are sufficient resources in place for key needs such as translation services, emotional well-being, support for children and adults and basic universal services for Health and Education. The contributions that can be made to help meet families identity and cultural needs locally must identified, planned and delivered.
- 20)The joint working, information sharing and project management for this programme must continue to ensure households experience a smooth transition from their refugee camps to the UK. In particular the dialogue with the Home Office and the South East Migration Partnership is vital to continue to benefit from examples of good practice from other Local Authorities and feed back strategic and operational successes and challenges.