

## Ashford Borough Council

### Decisions taken by the Cabinet on 30 January 2020

Minute No	Topic	Decision
287	Proposed Continuation of Planned Refugee Resettlement Beyond End of Current Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme	<p>The Leader introduced the report which advised that in October 2015 Members had approved the planned resettlement of up to 250 of the most vulnerable refugees from Syria to Ashford, under the Government's Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme up to 2020. Following the success of the scheme nationally, in June 2019 the Government had announced the amalgamation of all current planned refugee resettlement schemes into one scheme to continue beyond 2020. This was to be called the Global Resettlement Scheme (GRS).</p> <p>Ashford had achieved considerable success in supporting refugees into employment and continued to work with partners and potential employers to improve prospects. Around 40% of those available to work had secured paid employment (way above the national and regional figures of 3% and 11% respectively) and Ashford's scheme had been flagged by the Home Office as a particular success. The report also gave an overview of the national and local scheme and described the Council's plans to continue to play its part in the national commitment to planned refugee resettlement under GRS.</p> <p>A number of Members expressed their support for the continuation of the scheme and their pride in what Ashford had already done. Particular thanks were given to the Council's Refugee Resettlement Co-Ordinator who had led, developed and taken ownership of this whole scheme. Indeed her efforts had been recognised in the Queen's New Year's Honours last year and the Council had been listed as a finalist in the LGC Awards. Members also congratulated the Leader of the Council who had taken the brave political decision five years ago to pursue this course of action and had led by example on this initiative.</p> <p>Members considered it would be important to dispel some of the myths about the</p>

		<p>scheme. Ashford did not take people who had been through various countries and they were not using the existing Council Housing stock or jumping waiting lists. It was about taking vulnerable families with children, identified by the Home Office, directly from Syria, and housing them in available private rented property. The 50 people per year equated to about 10 families with children. The Chief Executive agreed that it would be useful to devise some sort of micro-site to be added to the Council's website which would explain what the Scheme was actually about and hopefully dispel some of the myths that had appeared on social media. Whilst it would not be useful or productive for the Council to respond to critical individuals on social media, a factual on-line resource where the public could be directed to in order to understand more about the scheme would be useful and she would task Officers to get that done.</p> <p>There followed a wider discussion on homelessness and the need to re-double efforts to deal with the increasingly visible problem of rough sleeping in Ashford. The Head of Housing gave an outline of current and upcoming initiatives and assured Members that, whilst this was by no means a simple or straightforward issue, the Council was working with a number of agencies and partners and had recently been successful in bidding for funding from the Ministry of Housing, in order to tackle the targets set by Government on rough sleeping. A Member advised that in the county, Ashford was seen as an exemplar authority in the way it dealt with homelessness, and in a way had perhaps become a victim of its own success. Whilst there was clearly more to do, it appeared that Ashford was certainly tackling this issue in the right way.</p> <p><b>Resolved:</b></p> <p><b>That (i) the success of the current Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme to date be noted.</b></p> <p><b>(ii) the planned resettlement of refugees In Ashford be extended to offer new lives to up to 50 people each year (approximately 10 families) under GRS, subject to availability of suitable private rented</b></p>
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